

POSSIBLE WORLDS : THE FICTION OF NAOMI MITCHISON

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PhD University of Edinburgh

1982



Acknowledgements

This study would have been impossible without the support of the Scottish Education Department and sadly incomplete without the generosity of Naomi Mitchison; the judicious guidance of Professor John MacQueen of Edinburgh University; the assistance of the staff of the National Library of Scotland and of the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas; and the patience of Mrs. Audrey Walters who corrected my spelling.

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Abstract of Thesis

Born in the eighteen nineties, Naomi Mitchison's literary inheritance was Edwardian, her personal and intellectual context that of the Haldane family who combined a Scottish background with Oxford science and the politics of the British Empire.

Establishing her reputation as a historical novelist Mitchison moved on to attempt a monumental treatment of mythic themes in "The Corn King and the Spring Queen" (1931). Economic and political upheaval in the nineteen thirties shifted her fiction in a more pragmatic direction but, on the outbreak of World War II when Mitchison moved to Scotland and was caught up in the Scottish Renaissance movement, she returned to the literary treatment of myth in "The Bull Calves" (1947).

Mitchison's literary practice was deeply influenced by J.G.Frazer's "The Golden Bough" and by the philosophical psychology of C.G.Jung. Broadly a philosophical Romancer, a study of the part played in Mitchison's work by anthropological ideas throws light both on the interaction between anthropology and the novel in twentieth-century literature, and on the nature of the Romance mode.

The fruits of a long literary career are displayed not only in the major fictions but in the deceptively slight later Romances, notably "Memoirs of a Spacewoman" (1962) which also brings Mitchison full circle to her earliest family influences.

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1.

PROLOGUE: HISTORICAL TERRITORIES

Naomi Mitchison was born into a family of strong personalities each of whom made a distinctive contribution to the growth of her own character and interests. Her mother, Louisa Kathleen Trotter, came of a landed Scottish family with connections throughout Britain and Ireland among the prominent and propertied. From an early age the young Louisa Kathleen established herself as a force to be reckoned with, and in later life her resolute individualism manifested itself in a passionate commitment to the cause of nation and empire, entities which she fervently held to be inseparable. With an independence of mind uncharacteristic of her period and class she established her political allegiances and the freedom to act upon them, as conditions of her marriage to Naomi Mitchison's father, John Haldane.¹

The Haldanes were also a landed Scottish family, based at Gleneagles in Perthshire, but one of a very different ethos from the Lothian Trotters. As well as a long tradition of social and political involvement in Scottish church, law court and government, the Haldanes possessed strongly individual religious and intellectual interests which looked to the continent rather than to England. Educationally it was to the Scottish universities that they turned and to Germany rather than to Oxford or Cambridge; in matters religious, whether in agnosticism or belief, they were low rather than high church (Presbyterian rather than Episcopalian); and their politics were

1. Louisa Kathleen Haldane Friends and Kindred (London, 1961) p.152.

Liberal and rationalist as opposed to the emotive Toryism of John's Trotter bride.

The total influence of parents and relations on Naomi Mitchison left her with a rich but often contradictory legacy. From her grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Haldane, she inherited the religious impulse to define oneself in relation to a universal "sum of things", and, somewhat incongruously given the elder Mrs. Haldane's deep-set evangelical piety, a taste for the anthropology of J.G.Frazer. In her aunt, Elizabeth Haldane, Naomi Mitchison had a model of local social involvement and, along with her grandmother, a source of information about the part-Highland, part-Lowland environment of Cloan, the family house. Yet despite the strong emotional and domestic influence of her mother in particular, it was with the male members of the family that Mitchison identified herself most deeply.

Figuring large in the background was Richard Haldane, John's elder brother, who was to become Liberal War Minister and Lord Chancellor. For Mitchison he embodied certain family ideals of progressive social leadership which were in their turn bound up with his devotion to the tenets of Idealist philosophy beginning with Plato and the Guardians of The Republic, and extending to the thought of Hegel and his German followers.¹ Thus Uncle Richard combined his rationalism with austere devotion to an Absolute which partook of both transcendental idealism and evangelical protestantism, and which he

1. See Naomi Mitchison Sittlichkeit (London, 1975)

addressed with presbyterian fullness at family prayers.¹

Naomi Mitchison's father studied like his brother in Germany and shared many of his Idealist presumptions although in a more muted form.² Politically too his convictions were deeply held in the Haldane manner, but he eschewed active politics in favour of his scientific work by which he was almost totally absorbed. From her physiologist father and her equally distinguished geneticist brother, J.B.S.Haldane, Mitchison inherited her lifelong interest in biology which, like her Uncle Richard's philosophical creed, was a blend of rationalism with a religious or imaginative sense of an Absolute, in this case a vitalistic life force which provided the evolutionary dynamic of biological and by extension social development.

John Haldane's scientific career had social as well as imaginative implications for Naomi Mitchison since it took him to Oxford where his daughter was educated at the Dragon school and, informally, at home and in the lecture halls and drawing rooms of Oxford academics. Thus the Haldane intellectual tradition was transferred to the English public school and university system: the young Haldanes mixed with the young Huxleys³ and Naomi Mitchison married a young man, Dick Mitchison,

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1. Mitchison discusses her childhood and the influence of Cloan in Small Talk (London, 1973) and All Change Here (London, 1975).
 2. See J.S.Haldane The Philosophy of a Biologist (Oxford, 1935).
 3. Julian and Aldous Huxley were close friends; Aldous Huxley lived with the Haldanes at Oxford and kept in touch with Naomi Mitchison intermittently throughout his life. His early literary success was a stimulus to Mitchison's own ambitions. See Grover Smith (ed.) Letters of Aldous Huxley (London, 1969), and Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) pp.95-100.

who like her brother had gone from Eton to Oxford Greats. Huxleys and Haldanes characterised an ambience which was liberal, agnostic, rationalistic and individualistic, yet interested in science and society, intensely moral, and not unsympathetic towards the imagination or what were described as the "higher values" of religion. The continuity of this liberal tradition which was born in the high noon of Victorianism and flourished in the relative stability of the first decade of the twentieth century, was rudely shattered by the First World War.

Common to all the Haldanes was an internationalism which gave Mitchison a broad cultural outlook and which extended itself, through the influence of her mother's imperial faith, to a worldwide humanism. This is the intellectual perspective of her fiction, but her family also gave her the impulse and the confidence to write for they were all readers and writers, keen to contribute to public debate and influence opinion. Bookshelves at Oxford and Cloan reflected a catholicity of intellectual curiosity which brought figures as disparate as Andrew Lang, the folklorist and poet; T.H.Huxley; the Archbishop of York; and Hume Brown, the Scottish historian, into the family acquaintance.

In an autobiographical volume, All Change Here (1975), Mitchison describes her own early reading which, ranging from westerns to ghost stories, fairy tales to Plato, was in the family tradition of catholicity. It is a thoroughly Edwardian list, centring on Wells, Kipling, Galsworthy, Conan Doyle, Housman and Shaw with excursions into the late-Victorian worlds of Swinburne and Stevenson. Inclining

towards the Romance rather than mimetic pole of the fictional spectrum, it still betrays a nascent interest in society and social ideas.

The Edwardian era remained important for Mitchison not just because, like so many of her generation, she looked back to it as an era of peace and stability before the cataclysm of the First World War, but because her fundamental literary instincts derive from the writers of that period. Although in many respects the accession of Edward VII to the throne so late in life was a guarantee of the Victorian regime's continuity, the Edwardian moment was marked by an increasing restlessness and sense of impending change if not disaster. The advances in knowledge and its technological applications which had been accelerating rapidly since the middle of the nineteenth century turned, in the words of one literary historian, "the minds of thoughtful men towards problems of consequences: how to live in a scientific universe and how to live with industrialism."¹ Hand in hand with this consciousness of social change went a preoccupation with history and schemes of history which reflects a thought world steadily readjusting itself in the wake of Darwin and Hegel.

Nonetheless the prevailing impression of the Edwardian era is one of literary conservatism, a phenomenon identified by Samuel Hynes as one of the principal justifications for the claim of the century's first decade to be a separate literary period.

Among the remarks by literary persons that one might gather concerning the end of the nineteenth century,

1. Samuel Hynes Edwardian Occasions (London, 1972) p.2.

none, I think, would speak of technique. Not only Wells - one would scarcely expect him to worry about such matters - but Yeats as well looked to changes in society, in human relations, in an imaginative 'world', and the consequences for the artist of those changes. And this, I take it, is a fundamental fact about the Edwardian decade, understood as a literary period: it was concerned with the state of society, and acknowledged the urgency and force of social change, but it was not concerned to effect a literary revolution. 1

This mixture of radical thinking with literary conservatism marks all of Naomi Mitchison's work and it stems from these earliest literary influences. It is associated in the Edwardian era and in Mitchison's fiction with the primacy of the story line in narrative, a dependence on genre conventions and a preference for the Romance mode. These authorial inclinations relate to the appropriateness, in a period of social change, of a fiction which, through the creation of imaginative heterocosms, simplifies the complexities of reality while achieving thematic significance in the juxtaposition of the dream worlds of Romance and the normal sense of reality within the same literary works. Yet equally important was the continuing expansion of the reading public and the need for books which could cater for popular taste without sacrificing artistic seriousness of purpose. This, I believe, is the great appeal of the Edwardians to the post-modernist literary critic, and it is a balancing act which Naomi Mitchison sustained through the succeeding decades of the century.

The kind of artist this atmosphere produced is one who, Hynes

1. Samuel Hynes Edwardian Occasions (London, 1972), p.5.

argues, does not fit the critical model of the impersonal artist creating autonomous artistic forms. Wells and Shaw, for instance, and Kipling too, expended their energies in public affairs, drew shamelessly on their own lives and wrote prolifically but unevenly. This is the Mitchison mould for although like Kipling she took her storymaking seriously, and although unlike these others her writing career began after 1910 when, as Virginia Woolf asserted, "human character changed", the social function of art remains for her paramount and her role as artist is inextricably tied up with her own social and political activity. This, in Mitchison's case, is the Edwardian inheritance and it is one that survived her friendship with prophets of the modernist aristocracy of art and aesthetic value, such as Wyndham Lewis, to re-emerge in a different but recognizably similar form in each decade of her literary work.

The writer who took shape in this crucible of personal background and literary historical context was one composed of differing and potentially contradictory elements. On the one hand was the rationality of the Haldane ethos, the science and philosophy of Mitchison's father and brother, and the sociology of Wells' science fiction. On the other were the suppressed imaginative energy of Haldane religion, the passionate, non-rational loyalties of Mitchison's mother, and the search in literature for the kind of heightened consciousness and quickening of the emotional pulse offered by certain kinds of poetry, and Romance fiction. This sense of two juxtaposing worlds, the pragmatic or the commonplace and the irrational or mysterious, was what Mitchison found in Kipling and what led her later to share the modernist fascination with myth and primitive culture.

In 1918, however, these developments were, for Mitchison, in the future; the immediate reality was of a young wife and mother, still, on the eve of immense changes, restricted by her sex and social position, but with intellectual interests and a penchant for literary scribbling. Such stories as survive from this period rely heavily on autobiographical experience which, being limited and confined largely to certain strata of English, upper middle-class society, provides a dangerously narrow base for fictional endeavour. Moreover the narrative mode is undecided, wavering from the dominant social realism of the inchoate "The Amazed Evangelists" to the toying with a fiction of utopian ideas displayed in "The Buy your Brothers Fund", both of which pieces Mitchison herself relegates to the category of juvenilia.¹

The catalyst which launched Mitchison's writing career proper was her "discovery" of history.² Bored by the subject as a schoolgirl, she stumbled, as it were by accident, on the ancient Mediterranean as a free space in which her cramped imagination could stretch its wings. The ancient cultures of Greece, Rome, Egypt and their barbarian neighbours became, through the mediation of Mitchison's imagination, heterocosms in which the complete range of human experience, and not least the extremes of slavery and freedom, life and death, might be depicted. Rapidly, under cover of historical and therefore academic respectability, the ancient world was established as Naomi Mitchison's imaginative territory - a territory which could sustain both the

1. Both pieces survive undated in the National Library of Scotland, Accession 6120.

2. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.161.

empirical and the fantastic reaches of her art.

Written in the backwash of this initial enthusiasm, Mitchison's first novel, The Conquered (1923), gained complimentary reviews and immediate recognition.¹ Read now it still evokes a sense of energy and release which seethes beneath the disciplined clarity of the descriptive style and the firmness of the plot construction. The novel is a Romance tale following the growth of a young Gallic chieftain through the turns and counter turns of defeat, enslavement, revenge, loyalty and betrayal. Triumph in The Conquered is not military one-upmanship but a return to the fundamental passions of land loyalty, kinship bonds, love and death: the novel moves from the suicide of Fiommar which is the most emotionally charged and most committed act of loyalty in the book, to the final death of her brother Meromic which is portrayed as a return to the same native powers of life and death.

The historical reference or content of The Conquered is more a matter of setting than of theme, of surface as opposed to substance. It is part of the effet du reel of the novel which is achieved through the crispness and accuracy of the descriptive writing - a stylistic virtue which Mitchison herself ascribes to the influence of Kipling.²

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1. An anonymous review in the Times Literary Supplement said that Mrs. Mitchison's scenes were sketched in with "an intense, an almost Hogarthian, realism which shows Mrs. Mitchison as an artist of great power". (Times Literary Supplement, Thursday May 24, 1923). E.M.Forster wrote describing the book as "moving and beautiful" (Unpublished letter from E.M.Forster to Naomi Mitchison, 23rd December 1923).
 2. Naomi Mitchison All Change Here (London, 1975), p.36.

In her historical writing Mitchison also puts a habit of empirical observation, nurtured by home and school exercises of diary writing, to work on the artefacts and material culture of her subjects.

He was very tall, with a reddish face, fair hair combed to the sides, and the deep stain of woad across his forehead and the backs of his hands. Bracelets and rings and sword-hilt were bronze, but he wore a necklace of mother-of-pearl, and hanging from it on a loop, a little greyish round of bone from some enemy's skull. Beside him was Fiommar in a long yellow dress, embroidered from neck to hem with fine curves of stem and leaf and the thin beaks of curlew; her hair was combed down her back and snooded with beads and gold; her brooches were bows of silver and coral, her necklaces of amber and blue glass beads, and her cheeks were flushed in the hot hall.

(The Conquered, pp.18-19)

The description is factual but not without emotive touches such as the piece of human skull. Moreover the atmosphere is charged with the impending betrothal of the woad-stained Briton and Fiommar who have not seen each other before, so the camera eye of the description moves from Fiommar's eyes on Gandoc ("the backs of his hands"), to those of the visitor on Fiommar, moving upwards towards the flushed cheeks. The factual surface of the prose maintains its objectivity, but syntax, sentence construction, narrative pace and focus suggest underlying and often emotive points of view.

The strength of Naomi Mitchison's writing in The Conquered is the manner in which it can heighten the emotional colour of the narrative without disrupting the harmony and progression of style. The novel depends for its hold on the reader's attention, on the recurrence of these charged sequences which appeal through the senses of colour, sound, touch and rhythm to a latent taste for sex and violence.

11.

.. but when the branding was over, all but the smell of singed flesh, the dealer came up to him with a whip. Meromic crouched, turning his hurt arm and shoulder to the floor the dealer knew all about screening wounds, and acted accordingly.

(The Conquered p.91)

Two other men were separating the fighters; and then the girl collapsed heavily onto Titus' shoulder. There was a deal of blood everywhere; it was dripping steadily from his hand, which he clenched to stop the flow; the girl? She was unhurt; but as she undid the plaid there was wail on wail from the child, its face all crumpled up with pain, its hands clutching at air. The mother sank to her knees, tearing at the brooch to get the dress open; the baby fastened on to her breast with a sob, and sucked hard for a moment before it began screaming again; its soft little arm was cut from elbow to shoulder.

(The Conquered p.36)

Or, in a clear example of Mitchison's merging of love and death in the realm of the passions, there is the account of Fiommar's suicide.

Meromic, with his eyes shut, warm against his sister's soft heart-beating, felt her suddenly quiver all over; he looked up; she smiled at him with all the colour ebbing out of her cheeks; her hands fluttered for a moment over his face; she fell on her side. From the slope below, the wild goats bleated faintly together; a tuft of thistle-down blew across Fiommar's hair; she seemed to sink lower into the turf. He bent over her, looking at her closely

(The Conquered p.85)

These passages betray a moral naivety because their appeal to the senses and emotions is not balanced by a structure of moral ideas or by an overall view, interpretation or impression of experience. The novel does touch on moral conflicts since Meromic, who is throughout rooted in the Gallic world of his childhood and youth, comes, because of his personal loyalty to the humane Roman Titus, to fight

against his own people and to contribute towards the defeat of the first great pan-Gallic leader, Vercingetorix. Thus Meromic's barbarian tribalism is measured against the code of personal honour or morality offered by Roman civilization at its best, while the emergent ideal of pan-Gallic patriotism is in turn contrasted with the massive insensitivity of Roman imperial might. However, these ideas remain an unresolved suggestion of contrasts, because they bear only an indirect relation to the moral consciousness of the characters which is subject finally to the dynamics of a good story rather than to the author's thematic intentions.

Other themes which were to become important in Mitchison's subsequent work remain overshadowed in The Conquered by the naive exuberance of the storytelling. Contemporary historical reference, for instance, which is implied by the chapter headings from Irish poetry, is never given distinct or purposeful shape within the narrative: the only connection between Mitchison's Meromic and the Ireland of 1917 is a romanticised conception of the Celt triumphing spiritually or imaginatively in historical defeat. Also in the background is the associated figure of Vercingetorix, the hero or king who symbolizes the aspirations of the oppressed Gallic nation and who gives himself sacrificially to preserve his followers' lives. He is the precursor of a series of kings or queens who die for their people, which runs through Mitchison's novels.

Ultimately the entertainment value of The Conquered outweighs its moral seriousness. The book established Mitchison's reputation as a good historical novelist or writer of Romances, in the Graham Greene

sense of "entertainments", and it made her an influence on many other specifically historical novelists such as Rosemary Sutcliff and Henry Treece.¹ Although commercially beneficial, this type casting had an unfortunate consequence for Mitchison's development as a writer, since when she came to attempt other things she was restricted by the expectations of publishers and readers. This study is an attempt to set Mitchison's literary work in a wider context than that of her reputation as a historical novelist, and in the process to extend the meaning and possibilities of the term Romance beyond that of entertainment.

Between the publication of The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931), the magnum opus of Mitchison's early historical writing, and the appearance in 1923 of The Conquered, Naomi Mitchison produced no less than forty-two short stories, a novella or Romance tale, a collection of poems and another novel, Cloud Cuckoo Land (1925). This was her professional apprenticeship and her output in these years is characterised by diversity and experimentation. By varying her style and method according to the different historical settings with which she is working, Mitchison creates a series of imaginative worlds, each of which embodies some aspect of her interest in personality and society. The best of these stories reveal a deepening sense of history and at the same time a subtle mode of continuous psychological symbolism that modulates itself according to the tone or intensity of the narrative.

1. Rosemary Sutcliff, Henry Treece, Alfred Duggan, Robert Graves and Mary Renault are all heirs of the Mitchison style of historical fiction.

Naomi Mitchison's Greek world is one of clarity and light, sharp detail and vivid colour.

Then April hardened and dried into summer and autumn, till not even the lean goats could find a sprig of green to crunch, and the prickly low bushes dried brown and the thistles golden yellow, and nothing was left alive but ants and little beetles, and roots and seeds heat-stricken and sleeping heavily as the Corn Gods sleep from death to rebirth, and all night long the earth-born, earth-coloured crickets, rejoicing and undisturbed.

(Black Sparta p.242)

With a keen eye for natural detail, Mitchison is also sensitive to the rhythms of Greek and imitates them with her use of compound adjectives. Her imagery is culturally appropriate reflecting what she conceives to be the Hellenic group mentality - the Greekness of the Greeks - and the characters who inhabit this milieu are, with the exception of the Spartans, individualists, responsive to nature and innovative in action.

Mitchison is also interested in tribalism or, as she understands it at this juncture, the barbarian mentality. In these stories the language is tailored to a communal viewpoint which is distrustful of individualism, directed towards concrete material realities, and yet touched by powerful fears and joys.

The man, Three Red, stood at the top of his field and looked down. He had dug every inch of it himself on the days the Chief had blessed for them; he had not once looked over his left shoulder. His wife had sown the seed with him, saying nothing except the appointed words from sunrise to sunset. He had given the Chief half a deer and a woven basket and two pots of honey to keep away the white devils that scatter stones that are no use on the hillside, and send little grubs to eat the seed corn. But even so, his barley was coming up unevenly with great patches of bad bare ground that grew nothing at all, like an old man's head.

(Barbarian Stories p.11)

Religion and ritual are usually indicators in Mitchison's stories of communal viewpoint; she psychologises the forms and language of religion in order to express her sense of the human psyche as a fundamental character force, moulded into various forms by the evolution of culture.

These early historical stories range from evocations of a commonplace colloquial reality which may be disturbed by shades of passion or violence, to out-and-out magical or dream narratives such as the adult fairy tale, "Niempso Kar". The most successful stories are pitched at the middle of this scale of verisimilitude, from where the narrative can move in either direction, a technique exemplified by Mitchison's "saga" fiction which imitates the combination of stern realism with supernatural intrusions that characterises the Norse originals. Thus in "The Konung of the White Walls", a story of Viking mercenaries in Byzantine Russia, the all-too-human motives of Sveneld, the war band leader, mingle with the more mysterious purposes of his native witch-wife and the decadent sensibility of the royal princess, Thephano, in a unified literary heterocosm, held together by the style and the peculiar sense of psychological reality which it creates.

The early tales also display increasing intellectual sophistication and thematic complexity. Mitchison's Greek collection, Black Sparta (1928) concludes with an intriguing doublet of stories, "The Epiphany of Poiessa" and "Black Sparta", which embraces the two poles of her Hellenism. The former explores the worship of the Greek goddess, Hera, on an otherwise individualistic and secularised Aegean island. The maiden cult of the goddess is represented as appropriate to the natural

spirit of Poiessa, and the rite of bathing the cult image by moonlight is described with numinous delicacy. However the crude stone idol embodies lingering forces of ancient superstition and taboo, and when it is broken in a daredevil and irreverent prank, murder ensues. This bleak situation is reversed when Timas, who has been drawn to spy on the rite by both natural curiosity and residual fear, runs away with the hitherto sacrosanct priestess, Nikaro. Such joyous, life-affirming humanity is, the narrative implies, the true religious spirit, but although the cult of Hera will continue with a more aesthetic statue, something of its power and awesomeness will have been lost.

"Black Sparta" also investigates the hold of a group mentality, this time from the perspective of the collectively organised Spartan state. The story hinges around the consequences for one Spartiate of making a decision (the freeing of a Helot serf who had saved his life), based on personal rather than communal feeling. In Sparta one can only be an enemy or a psychological slave and this individual action must, for the sake of the offender himself and for the survival of the community, be seen as an irrational aberration. To symbolise this passing out of unreality and madness, both the maverick and his pursuers fall asleep and then return to the city as if nothing untoward had occurred. This mentality is made credible throughout by the style, which seems to encompass the characters within an impersonal force against which they are, in the long run, powerless to think or act.

The search among differing social and psychological types for individual happiness and a Utopian ideal is also the theme of Naomi Mitchison's second novel, Cloud Cuckoo Land (1925), which links the

Athenian or Greek individualistic, the communal Spartan, and the decadent Persian options through the motif of journeying or questing. The novel is a collocation of the short story methods and suffers from a consequent looseness of structure, as well as from the unremitting ordinariness of its principal characters, Alxenor and Moiro. However it is, in reduced scale, an interesting anticipation of the design of The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931).

The latter novel is a monumental and comprehensive statement of all that Naomi Mitchison had been working towards in the historical fiction of the previous decade. Its epic proportions reflect the literary mood of the time which produced several monumental treatments of mythic themes such as The Waste Land in 1922, Ulysses in the same year, and T.E. Lawrence's The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, which Mitchison read in the privately printed edition of 1926 when she was embarking on The Corn King.¹ At the same time the big novel is a natural development from the short story and novel writing which preceded it since it expands and clarifies the social and psychological themes implicit in these works.

From her early literary endeavour Mitchison carried forward two major problems which were to surface repeatedly in her more ambitious fiction. The first was how to reconcile her intense imaginative worlds with the speculative, thematic structures in which she sought increasingly to place them. The second was how to handle the play of

1. Mitchison's letter about the book and T.E. Lawrence's replies survive in the National Library of Scotland, accession 6610.

individual character or psychological realism within a Romance mode, the mimetic content of which was secondary to its overall psychological construction and thematic intention. Mitchison's first youthful discovery of her historical territories was only a prelude to the complex charting of these imaginative forms and their interaction with empirical reality.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CORN KING AND SPRING QUEEN - I

In writing her seven-hundred page novel The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931), between 1925 and 1931,¹ Naomi Mitchison took pains to work from the best available historical material. Her subject was the Mediterranean world in the third century B.C., particularly Greece and the mixed culture of the Black Seas's northern coastline. During this period two Spartan kings, Agis and Kleomenes, inaugurated wide-ranging reforms which aimed to restore the ancient Spartiate polity, and which aroused the ire of the dominant Achaean League or alliance. As well as absorbing the ancient sources and the recognised modern works, Mitchison consulted the eminent authorities of the day who were then engaged on the production of the Cambridge Ancient History.²

1. "As it happens I have a complete time-sheet of that book, though not of any of the others which were usually fairly straightforward. I started it in 1925: 'London and Varengeville: Part One to the middle of Part Two.' After that I was mostly writing short stories and there were various external happenings like the General Strike. In 1928, 'summer to winter', I wrote in Spreacombe and London. Much of Part Three was written in London 'with bad cold just before Christmas'. This period also covered the illness and death of our son, which echdes somewhat through the book.

'I then worked hard at it in 1929. The record goes: 'Winter London rest of Part Three. Working out Part Four. Spring Oslo and Stockholm Part Four'' "

(Naomi Mitchison You May well Ask p.166)

After this the record is fairly continuous until the book was finished in June 1931. The bulk of the novel was written after 1928 when Mitchison was coming under the influence of Gerald Heard. The gaps in the record may have contributed to some of the book's structural problems.

2. Correspondence between Naomi Mitchison and W.W.Tarn, and Naomi Mitchison and F.E.Adcock, survives. These men were contributors to the Cambridge Ancient History, volumes of which appeared in 1928 (Vol.VII) and 1930 (Vol.VIII). H.T. Wade-Gery, a noted Hellenist and translator of Pindar, was also a close friend and influence. In Black Sparta (1928) several of the short stories are built around a Pindaric ode while Tarn's romantic and unorthodox view of Cleopatra remained with Mitchison to surface in Cleopatra's People (1970).

She prided herself on her knowledge of a field - Greece, Rome and the ancient world - which was traditionally the preserve of the masculine educational system.¹

The historical sources for the Greek side of the novel are however well suited to fictional treatment. Plutarch's Agis and Kleomenes is based on the history of an Athenian devotee of the Spartan way of life, Phylarchus, who may have been one of Kleomenes' entourage, and whose partisan enthusiasm colours Plutarch's biography. Mitchison also worked from Polybius, a normally reliable historian, who, as a Megalopolitan, betrays a strong anti-Spartan bias. Plutarch's Life of Aratos a further source, draws heavily on Aratos' own memoirs. Moreover Plutarch himself was as much moralist and psychologist as historian; one modern critic describes his Agis and Kleomenes as "a rhetorical and dramatic narrative, full of passionate declamations and sentimental, often erotic anecdotes, which put the accent wholly on the principal characters, painted white or black."² It is, in Plutarch's own terms, a drama by which Sparta shows that even in extremity "Virtue cannot be subdued to Fate".

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1. "I talked to the Manchester Jewish Literary Societies about the position of Women in the Ancient World. I don't quite know why you call it an escapade. I probably know more about it than anyone in Europe except possibly Briffault."

Unpublished letter from Naomi Mitchison to her mother. Undated but belonging to this period.

Greek and Latin scholarship held a special challenge for women in the post-war period. Virginia Woolf learnt Greek and struggled through the Greek dramatists.

2. E.D. Tigerstedt The Legend of Sparta in Classical Antiquity (Uppsala 1974) Vol.II pp.54-5.

Naomi Mitchison uses Plutarch in much the same way that Shakespeare did: she deepens the moralists character analyses, usually by introducing an element of contradiction, and utilises the unified dramatic sequences which are already present in the Lives. Her Kleomenes remains heroic in his military leadership, his self-control and his dedication to the renewal of traditional Spartan virtues, but he is tinged with ambition and fanaticism. Although historical judgement would suggest that Kleomenes was not implicated in the murder of his fellow-king, Archidamos,¹ in The Corn King he is, and this, along with a series of other morally dubious actions, opens up a gap between the philosophy of Kleomenes' stoic mentor Sphaeros and his own realpolitik. Taking as her historical clue the great Spartan's refusal to commit suicide after the Battle of Sellasia, Mitchison traces a development of diminishing humanity and increasing political obsession which is only reversed in the final heroic self-destruction of the Alexandrian revolt.

Politically too Naomi Mitchison emphasises the contradictions. The social revolutions of Agis and Kleomenes were not in fact socialist measures but were designed to renovate the core Spartiate class and therefore the ethos and might of Lyncurgan Sparta. In order to achieve this, the wealth which had accumulated in the hands of a few, numerically declining families had to be re-distributed and the citizen body enlarged through the enfranchising of members of the lower orders.² Fictionally these aims are presented by Mitchison as

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1. Cambridge Ancient History Vol.VII The Hellenistic Monarchies and Macedonia, p.753.
 2. Ibid Chapter XXIII passim "The Greek Leagues and Macedonia", contributed by W.W.Tarn.

only one strand in the revolutionary movement alongside an emphatically socialist reading of Helot liberation and equality. The same ambivalence surrounds Kleomenes' diplomacy since on the one hand he is represented as combating the oligarchical decadence of the Achaean League and spreading the message of social reform, while on the other, his policy is a struggle for personal hegemony.¹ Naomi Mitchison's portrait is designed to leave Kleomenes' motivation ambiguous.

The narrative structure of the tale leans heavily on Plutarch particularly after the loss of Argos - a tragic reversal in the Aristotelian manner - when political and military nemesis closes in on Sparta and all hope for personal happiness is lost. In these episodes Mitchison develops and extends an already coherent and emotive narrative with detailed descriptive writing. At other points the alterations are more radical: the original changeover effected by Kleomenes' policies is a very matter-of-fact affair in Plutarch's pages, whereas Mitchison builds up a heightened atmosphere of revolutionary idealism and a sense of common cause as seen through the adolescent fervour of Philylla. It is in the heroic self-immolation of Kleomenes and his Spartan twelve that the relationship between the two authors is at its thematically closest for reasons which are of some importance.

1. "Indeed had Kleomenes been content to make peace with the willing Aratos and devote himself to the internal betterment of Sparta it does not appear what could have prevented his revolution being permanently successful But he was in the grip of his ambition; and he was dreaming, not of peace for Sparta or of social reform elsewhere, but of the hegemony of the Peloponnese, perhaps of Greece, and of playing Alexander in a new League of Corinth." Cambridge Ancient History Vol.VII p.755.

In The Corn King the middle-class luxury of Sparta has led to a decline in religion. The ancient religious cult surrounding the Divine Twins from whom the two kings of Sparta were held to be descended, has lost the aura of dread which once surrounded it, and the decadent religious sensibilities of the rich are catered for by imported Eastern cults. Indeed Kleomenes himself contravenes the hereditary taboos by combining the two kingships in the one family. However, Mitchison, with hints from Plutarch, informs the Spartan story with a religious or ritual significance of her own devising.

This mythopoeic underlay is a recreation of Greek hero-cult devotion. Unlike the Homeric epics which humanise the gods, this sensibility divinised men as demi-gods, who inspired adulation rather than dread and around whom centred a memorial cult. Such cults often had a historical aspect but this may have been secondary to an older ancestor-worship.¹ The study of such cults belongs to the realm of anthropology or religion and it is the religious and mythic tones of the narrative which lend it a depth and complexity beyond the level of realistic historical reconstruction. By analysing this quality in the Spartan narrative, particularly, at this juncture, in its closing stages, a first impression may be gained of Naomi Mitchison's use of anthropological ideas.

When the Spartans realise that their position in Alexandria is

1. The best contemporary account of these cults available to Mitchison was L.R. Farnell Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality (Oxford, 1921) but Mitchison's interpretation is closer to the more strictly anthropological view of Jane Harrison's Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (Cambridge, 1903) Chapter VII.

hopeless, they resolve to make a last desperate gamble which will at the least enable them, in Plutarch's words, "to die in a manner worthy of Sparta". On the eve of their attempt they hold a feast to which Plutarch gives the following notice, "For Kleomenes made a sacrifice and gave the guards a bountiful share of his provisions, and then took his place at table with garlands on his head and feasted with his friends."¹ The atmosphere of this feast is evoked by Mitchison as follows:

They were being drawn closer and closer together. There were all ages of strong manhood; they had known all kinds of different experience. Half of them were married or had been. Whatever happened, this meal, this meat and bread and wine, was the last of some series; either the last of shame and imprisonment and waiting - or the last of life.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.639)

The emotional tension is indicated by short sentences concentrated around rhythmically-strong phrases - "closer and closer", "few enough", "strong manhood". Further the passage has an overall rhythmic development through the longer lists of "this meat and bread and wine", and "shame and imprisonment and waiting", to the alliterative finality of "the last of life". All of these poetic devices are engaged in order to support the tone of sacral significance. It is a feast of "twelve and the King" (the inversion sets him apart) and the elements of the sacral meal are "meat and bread and wine".

Throughout this emotionally charged scene the multiple significance of the feast is evolved. It is a feast of the dead when old comrades are recalled, and it is a Mystery, a Hellenistic love-

1. Plutarch "Agis and Kleomenes" Chapter XXXVII.

feast, when human attachments are valued and renewed in the shadow of death. Thus wives are remembered and the bonds of Spartiate love between the men, especially Kleomenes and Panteus. The meal is the culmination of the Spartiate experience of fellowship and community with which the whole of the Greek narrative has concerned itself.

For such a communion there is, as the feasters comment, a direct analogue, the Spartan Phiditia or "last eating together", but the description borrows from Christian symbolism (the Twelve and the eucharist) and from the Egyptian Mysteries with their suggestion of a "threshold" beyond death.

'There is a feast before the rising of Osiris.
I am not sure whether I should speak of it. No,
I am sure. The God becomes Corn, becomes bread.
He is taken and eaten by the Initiates. They
become one through him. It was like this.'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen pp.641-2)

The god of the feast is Kleomenes himself and there is also a reminder of the Corn King of Marob who is eaten for his people. This merging of cultures can to some extent be justified historically in the Hellenistic atmosphere, but there is a further impulse behind Naomi Mitchison's method. By drawing on many ritual analogues she is attempting to penetrate a common reservoir of human emotion which, she suggests, will tend to express itself in similar ways regardless of period or culture. The presence of the Christian analogues relates this insight to Mitchison's contemporary readership.

The Spartan revolt results in a series of heroic deaths, both suicides and executions, three of which are particularly important in the novel. Leaving aside Kleomenes' fate, it is Panteus and Philylla

who take the centre of the stage. Plutarch has not yet mentioned either of these characters but by introducing them at the climax he greatly enhances the pathetic effect of his narrative.

..... then each of the others calmly and cheerfully himself, except Panteus, the man who led the way in the capture of Megalopolis. He had once been the king's favourite because in his youth he was most fair, and in his young manhood most amenable to the Spartan discipline
..... 1

Among these women was the wife of Panteus, most noble and beautiful to look upon. The pair were still but lately married, and their misfortune came upon them in the heyday of their love. Her parents indeed would not permit her to sail away with Panteus immediately, although she wished to do so, but shut her up and kept her under constraint; a little later however, she procured herself a horse and a small sum of money, ran away by night, made all speed to Taenarum, and there embarked upon a ship bound for Egypt. 2

From these nuclei Naomi Mitchison develops her major characters, Philylla and Panteus. The principal traits of both are their physical beauty, their youthful fervour for the Spartan renewal and their devotion to Agiatis and Kleomenes respectively. Their love is bound up with the springtime of Spartan idealism but their marriage is narrowed and squeezed out by the decline of Sparta's fortunes. They become, in Mitchison's hands, the Maiden (Kore) and Youth (Kouros) of Greek mythology and their relationship with each other is overshadowed by their individual relationships with the Mother-figure, Agiatis, and the Hero-King, Kleomenes. This mythological structure underlies the

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1. Plutarch "Agis and Kleomenes" Chapter XXXVII.
 2. Ibid Chapter XXXVIII

pattern of Spartan love to which we shall return.

The deaths of Panteus and Philylla are in the heroic manner indicating that at the last they themselves have achieved the stature of Kingship and Queenship which characterised Agiatis and Kleomenes. Again Naomi Mitchison takes her lead from Plutarch.

At last all the rest lay prostrate on the ground, and Panteus, going up to each one in his turn and pricking him with his sword, sought to discover whether any spark of life remained. When he pricked Kleomenes in his ankle and saw that his face twitched, he kissed him, and then sat down by his side; and at the last the end came, and after embracing the king's dead body, he slew himself upon it. 1

This material is used in two ways in the novel. Firstly it forms the basis of a realistic, descriptive narrative.

He waited and counted and cried a good deal and called out people's names sharply, because he was alone and the flies were buzzing so. The kites and the dogs came nearer. When he looked up next Kleomenes was quite dead. It was easier after that. He pulled the King's tunic straight so as to cover him from the flies. He began to do the same for some of the others, but a kind of blackness had become to come down in him ...

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.643)

This contains no suggestion of heroic self-awareness, but Panteus' actions have a place in the overall interpretative structure of the novel. The moral enthusiasm evident in Plutarch's description is replaced by a sense that, underlying the fate of this individual, is a deeper pattern of human existence, an initiation, through heroic

1. Plutarch "Agis and Kleomenes" Chapter XXXVII.

suffering and death into maturity and leadership. It is appropriate therefore that Panteus should appear in the Kleomenes legend as depicted by Berris.

The third was the picture of the death of the men with Panteus fallen over Kleomenes.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.696)

A similar process can be traced in the case of Philylla. Once again Plutarch's description of his heroine's dignity and self-control is the starting point, but Mitchison bypasses Plutarch's metal enthusiasm to give a more realistic indication of Philylla's anger and distress. Nonetheless her death fulfills the pattern of Spartan womanhood as exemplified in Agiatis, the Mother, and she too has a place in the Spartan legend.

The next he turned over was the square charcoal drawing of the death of the children. It had been the hardest to do The women were mourning over the dead eldest son, the Boy Nikomedes, one older woman and one younger, Kratesikleia and Philylla. It was a curious parallel to one of his earlier pictures of the mother and grandmother mourning over the hanged King Agis, who had been only so few years older than Nikomedes. The figures of the women were beautiful ... but he had not yet faced making that final portrait of Philylla.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen pp.696-7)

The poignancy arises because Nikomedes, who should be succeeding Panteus as the Kouros is physically mutilated after a suicide attempt, and because Philylla has had to endure the severe demands of adult responsibility without the fulfillment of having her own children. The succession of the Spartan generations is brought to a rude halt.

The death and subsequent impaling of Kleomenes is a complex event

to which many strands in the novel lead. The attendant symbolism aims at a timeless, mythic intensity which is different in imaginative quality from the edifying, exemplary tone of the legend which his life and fate generate. This symbolism, in its Greek aspect, is derived from the hero-cults and is taken directly from Plutarch.

And a few days afterwards, those who were keeping watch on the body of Kleomenes where it hung, saw a serpent of great size coiling itself about the head and hiding away the face so that no ravening bird of prey could light upon it And the Alexandrians actually worshipped him coming frequently to the spot and addressing Kleomenes as a hero and child of the gods 1

The snake in this context can be an embodiment of the dead hero of Asclepios the healer who in snake form was closely connected with the ancestor-worship side of his cult.²

In the novel Kleomenes' impaling and the coming of the snake are only described at second hand or viewed through the medium of Berris' pictures. It is the rationalist, Sphaeros, who comes with the news of the snake.

'There is a great snake which has wound itself round his body and the stake. It keeps the birds from pecking at his head. I have not seen it yet, but I have heard on good authority that it is so. It is very curious. One knows that dead bodies breed worms and beetles, but I do not think that can be the explanation here What's the matter?

'Nothing' said Berris, 'but I have heard that the bodies of heroes in the old days were guarded by snakes or even changed into snakes. I have heard that a snake is the easiest thing a man can turn into, or a woman.

1. Plutarch "Agis and Kleomenes" Chapter XXXIX.

2. See J.E.Harrison Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion Chapter VII and J.E.Harrison Themis (Cambridge, 1912) p.382.

' 'Superstitions,' said Sphaeros, frowning"

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.686)

This quotation exemplifies the resolute realism with which the novel, on one level, treats these supernatural occurrences. On another level, there is the static, retrospective credence of the legend.

"There was one more small sketch of the stake with its crosspiece and the snake coiled on it."

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' p.696)

Between these two poles there is a vital imaginative quickening on which the success of Naomi Mitchison's method turns: the outwardness of religious and cultural reconstruction must give way to a symbolic inwardness to which the modern imagination can respond. In the case of the sacral meal, this is achieved because the narrative recreates the event in such a way as to encompass its realistic and ritual dimensions. The deaths of Panteus and Philylla are so inherently emotive, since they are bound through personal love to Erif and Berris, that the ritual undertones of their treatment throughout the novel surface at the end as an appropriate mode of narrative heightening. But the transformation of Kleomenes' death from history to myth is complex and problematic, and since its imaginative force is linked with Erif's consciousness any evaluation of it must be postponed.

The heroic legend of Kleomenes, though lacking the intensity of myth, has its own distinctive vigour. It begins with Kleomenes' predecessor, Agis, who instituted a Spartan renewal similar to his, and who died for his convictions.

" 'Agis grew restless in the heat of summer and went up into the mountains of Sparta, and stayed there alone for two nights. Then he came down and looked with new eyes at the country, and saw how evil the times were, and he knew so clearly that there was no doubting it that he must bring back Sparta to the Good Life. So he cast away all pleasures and softness, all the graces and sweetness of his young life, and followed the old rules.' "

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' p.87)

The literary model for the story as Sphaeros tells it is the Bible: Agis is like the prophet of God or Christ himself who has a vision of righteousness and resolves that the people are to live by it. The stoic ethos of Mitchison's reformist Sparta has a marked Hebraic cast though the Greek sense of the "graces and sweetness" of young life is also present. Berris' art reflects how Agis' life shapes that of Kleomenes.

... first more scenes from the life of Agis, or the old ones done again, among them the death scene, the hanged King; and after that scenes from the life of Kleomenes the killing of the ephors: the King's times, which were to bring such strength and beauty, beginning not gradually or in peace, but suddenly and with a sword. Then the rich men casting away their goods and gold to follow the king, even the women plucking the jewels from their hair and breasts He made another after that, an imaged one, in which Kleomenes frowning and with mouth set, and a whip of knotted cords, drove out Luxury, Usury and Greed, in the shape of snarling fat old traders, from the Temple of Sparta.

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' pp.611-12)

The comparison with Christ is more evident here and the sequence, at this point unfinished; foreshadows Kleomenes' own Passion with its Last Supper, Scourging (flogging) and Crucifixion (impaling). Both Agis and Kleomenes are like Christ in their quest for an ideal Kingdom and in the devotion they inspire from the women who are close to them

- a younger woman who is the Magdalene or the Maiden and an older woman who is both Mary and Demeter, the Greek Mother. However, the human emotions of Christ are divided between the gentle, winning Agis and the angry revolutionary, Kleomenes.

The generative power of the legend lies in the point at which it comes closest to myth, the death of the King. As Agis' death gives birth to Kleomenes' endeavours so Kleomenes' end inspires the later, equally ill-fated social revolution of Nabis; this cycle is akin to the succession of the Marob kings and of the seasons themselves. Therykion the Spartiate expresses the same idea when he urges Kleomenes to die after Sellasia.

'I think there is a kind of beauty which is utterly lost in living and being rational and making plans and having material hopes: even for one's country, even for the New Times, even for Sparta. I think this is at the back of what Zeno and Iambulos say when they write down their dreams of what a state should be. I know you are right to say that even if we die looking on those hills, they will fade out for ever at the moment of death. But I think that your people and your revolution will get the beauty. I think your dying will put a bloom on them, Kleomenes.'

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' pp.503-4)

This constitutes a key interpretation of the central theme of kings who die for their people and of the renewed life which results from their act. Therykion goes beyond the characteristically Greek search for the Good Life or the Ideal State to suggest a kind of limited rebirth; Kleomenes' death "will put a bloom" on his people.

The historical derivation of Naomi Mitchison's Corn Kingdom, Marob, is more tenuous than that of her Spartan narrative but

nonetheless actual. The history of the South Russian steppes where Marob is located is still a confused story dependent almost exclusively on archaeological evidence. In the nineteen twenties it was a special interest of the Russian historian, Rostovtsev, who argued that the cultures of this heretofore obscure region were not only of intrinsic interest but had played an important role in the development of the Hellenistic world at large, not least its art.

..... the intersection of influences in that vast tract of country - oriental and southern influences arriving by way of the Caucasus and the Black Sea, Greek influences spreading along the sea routes, and Western influences passing down the great Danubian route; and the consequent formation, from time to time, of mixed civilisations, very curious and very interesting, influencing in their turn 1

Marob historically is one of the curious products of this cultural ebb and flow. More specifically the Marobians are Cimmerians pushed out of the steppes by the Scythians (the Red Riders) but retaining a hold on the Kuban delta and the Crimea. There they came under the influence of Greek traders and colonisers, merging with them in one area to form the important Bosphorus kingdom. Marob is not part of that kingdom but is probably dependent on it; it retains its tribal independence but has undergone a certain amount of Hellenisation. On a regional scale, Scythians, Cimmerians and Greeks are economically interlocked in the all-important corn trade.

One more twist remains. According to a theory, supported by

1. W.I.Rostovtsev Iranians and Greeks in South Russia (Oxford, 1922) p.7.

Rostovtsev, the Cimmerians were originally Thracians, a people akin to the Celts of The Conquered. Consequently Mitchison's Marobians are an amalgam of Cimmerian, Scythian, Greek and Thracian elements. The vigorous animal style of Berris' early metal art is Scythian; the gaily coloured coats and breeches of Marob are Thracian; their stature and handsome physiognomy, in contrast to the squat Mongoloid Scythians, are Cimmerian. In Herodotus and other ancient sources the Thracians are known as cattle and horse breeders, and as corn growers. In addition music and dance flourished among them and their women had a reputation for sexual freedom and witchcraft.¹ In short Marob corresponds to no single culture but is an eclectic construction from Naomi Mitchison's historical reading and her wanderings in the British and other museums.

Mitchison herself has described her habit of brooding over the art and artefacts of a people in the hope of evoking their culture from its material basis.

As far as possible, I took trouble to look at actual objects which might have been - just possibly - used by people in my historical books. Thus whenever I see the beautiful British bronze and enamel shield in the British Museum,² I feel it was once mine. In Oslo not only could I see the Bronze Age gear but I was allowed to have a splendid bronze torque on my own neck; only then did I realise that, like a Gladstone collar, a torque with its cutting end spirals compels one to hold up one's head proudly, generating real living pride. Equally the heavy bosses on a woman's girdle and her thick golden bracelets compel a certain attitude of the body which leads to attitudes in social life

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1. Cambridge Ancient History Vol.VIII "Rome and the Medietrranean 218-133 B.C.", Chapter XVII.
 2. Naomi Mitchison used this shield when writing her first novel, The Conquered (London, 1923).

And in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad in 1932,
I saw the marvellous objects from the kurgans
which Berris Der made in The Corn King. 1

This interest is reflected in the detailed descriptions of setting
and dress which characterise "The Corn King".

..... she wore a dress of thick linen, woven in
a pattern of squares, red and black and greyish
white; at the end of the sleeves the pattern
ended in two wide bands of colour. It had a
leather belt sewn with tiny masks of flat gold,
and the clasps were larger gold masks with
garnett eyes and teeth. Over all she wore a
stiff felt coat, sleeveless, with strips of fur
down the sides, and she was not cold despite the
wind off the sea.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.21)

Such visual empiricism is a relatively straightforward matter,
but the leap from an artefact to the user's state of mind is a complex
move to which the whole fabric of the author's mind contributes:
Mitchison's contemporary experience, her anthropological ideas, her
view of history and her sense of human life are involved. Though the
location, costume, artefacts and customs of Marob have some historical
sanction, culturally and experientially it is an imaginative
projection. The Black Sea historical material offered especial
opportunities for such a projection because, in the first instance,
of the scope it left the novelist. More positively Rostovtsev's
study as exemplified in the above quote gives a strong impression of
the flux of human life, which is also characteristic of Naomi Mitchison's
fiction. Although the motive historical forces usually remain on the
fringes of her attention, her constant themes are the mixing of cultures,

1. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.165.

the consequent social changes and the effect of these changes on personal relationships - the movement one might say of personal forces in history. For such a study "the intersection of influences" in the South Russian steppes supplied a perfect vehicle.

More radically still, the South Russian steppes offered a location for an imagined world which had occupied Naomi Mitchison for many years and which, by her own account, "comes, at various stages of its history, into almost all my books".¹ This daydream culture has a Graeco-Scythian flavour but more essentially it is part-barbarian, natural and free, though it is threatened on the one hand by a more developed imperial power and on the other by fully tribal marauders. This Marob first appeared in a cycle of plays which seem to have been written about nineteen-twenty and then extensively revised in the early years of that decade.² The plays follow the search for happiness of a large cast of characters some of whose names, Berris for example, reappear in The Corn King. The fate of this Marob and its people also centres around that of its King. However the Marob of the novel is a thorough transformation from that of the early plays. Standard dialogue and generalised characterisation have given way to an integrated and dramatic portrait of a culture and its leaders.

There are several ingredients in this transformation but the

1. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.165.

2. Two different typescript versions of these plays are held in the National Library of Scotland. The first of these versions is heavily emended in the author's handwriting. There is no evidence of a definite date for either.

principal one is certainly Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough (1890). The imaginative impact of this book on Mitchison began in childhood,¹ and its influence can be discerned in the pastoral atmosphere of the early Marob plays, but with the development of Mitchison's historical writing and the growth of her sense of history she returned to Frazer as a source of cultural understanding and historical reconstruction. From Frazer Mitchison borrowed the central idea of the Corn King as an embodiment of the Year or Vegetation Spirit and as the bearer of creative magical power. Further she modelled the seasonal cycle of Marob and its festivals on Frazer: Ploughing Eve is an instance of Frazer's Spring and Sowing Festival; Midsummer of his summer-solstice, fire festival. Her Harvest feast concerns itself with the death of Frazer's Vegetation Spirit as does the pastoral Bull festival, while the more subdued winter feast marks another solstice. As will become clear though in detailed analysis, Naomi Mitchison's imitation is not slavish for she does not copy Frazer's examples but responds to the variety and inventiveness of primitive cultures as revealed by the great anthropologist.

Many important elements in the novel derive from Frazer's influential text. The separation of an individual king figure from a council of elders and the consequent struggle to confine him through taboo and custom, as outlined in The Golden Bough, leads in Frazer's analysis to a tension between spiritual or magical affairs, in which

1. Naomi Mitchison was introduced to The Golden Bough by her grandmother, Mary Elizabeth Haldane, at Cloan the Haldane estate near Auchterarder, Perthshire. See Naomi Mitchison All Change Here (London, 1975) p.28.

the priest-king remains paramount though hedged about by taboo; and the temporal realm where the same man's role as political leader may be threatened.¹ From this analysis Mitchison constructs the situation between Tarrik and the Marob council in the early stages of the novel and the power struggle between him and Harn Der.

The Golden Bough also offers an understanding of a society based on magic, and Naomi Mitchison employs this understanding to recreate such a society.² As Frazer describes it, magic derives from a sense of sympathy between people, plants, animals and even inanimate objects, all of which are regarded as possessing spirit or soul. This belief is the raison d'etre of the Marob festivals but in The Corn King it also has a more private aspect: from the first page of the novel a kinship or intimacy is established between Erif and the natural world.

A crab came walking towards her over the shingle; she held out her hand, palm upwards, so that the crab walked over it. Erif Der laughed to herself; she liked the feeling of its stiff, damp, scuttling claws on her skin. She picked it up carefully by the sides of its shell and made it walk again, this time over her bare feet. A cloud came over the sun; she threw two more pebbles into the sea, sat up

("The Corn King and the Spring Queen" p.21)

This is not magic, but magic is only the concentration and purposeful direction of this same kinship.

1. J.G.Frazer The Golden Bough (London, 1890) Chapters III & IV.

2. Mitchison may have drawn on the work of Malinowski as well as Frazer to reinforce her understanding of how magic and myth serve as practical cultural forces shaping and motivating social life. See B.G.Malinowski Myth in Primitive Psychology (London and New York, 1926).

..... Erif bent down and began arranging her crabs. They sidled along, under cover of stones and driftwood, till the circle was full.

Erif stepped round the corner of the rock. The two saw her and, after one checked movement, a heave up and crouch down, stayed still regarding her and her circle. The crabs did not move either except that the stalks of their eyes twisted about a little and the tufts round their mouths were continuously and eagerly astir.

("The Corn King and the Spring Queen" p.267)

In the novel, though, this natural magic is distinctively feminine, the province of the witches and par excellence, the Queen, as opposed to the public power of Tarrik. According to Frazer magic power was held to reside in the objects or rites themselves and this is true of Tarrik's magic, but feminine magic in 'The Corn King' is dependent on the psyche of the individual practising it. Thus when the conflict of loyalties to her father and her husband breaks Erif's confidence and resolution, her magic is also broken; it depends, as she knows, on herself. Similarly, Erif's magic only has power over Tarrik's barbarian self; his Greek consciousness is beyond her control. This adds up to a naturalisation and humanisation of magic as an expression of the irrational and the unconscious in human beings, which goes beyond Frazer and the social belief-structure of Marob. Those who can practise such magic are those, particularly women, who are in touch with their inner irrational selves. All women, as Philylla sees, can be witches, although the highest magic of metamorphosis and the disembodied soul, which Frazer discusses, is, in Mitchison's terms, only for those advanced in the arts of both womanhood and witchcraft.

Another aspect of 'The Golden Bough' reflected in 'The Corn King'

is the universal diffusion of Frazer's key idea. The cyclical magic of the Vegetation Spirit is paralleled by the religious rituals of the Dying and Rising god, both phenomena appearing in different guises through a broad range of periods and cultures. A process of anthropomorphising the spirits and separating them from natural objects divides magic from religion but the same impulse, stemming ultimately from an existential anxiety about the sources of life, underlies both.¹ Thus the seasonal cycle of Marob, the heroic conflict of Kleomenes, the Helot corn festival and the mystery religions of Alexandria (whether devoted to Isis and Osiris, Adonis or Dionysius) are all united by the yearly cycle of fertility, wasting and renewed growth.

The various magic bearers or gods whose actions, myths or sacral deaths embody this sequence are treated by Naomi Mitchison under the unifying head of kingship and queenship. This twin symbol is crucial to the novel, particularly through the theme of kings who die for their people. At this juncture I wish simply to indicate how Mitchison selects this motif to represent the various roles of priest, magician, corn spirit (man, mother or maiden), hero, political leader and god in which Frazer detects the death and rebirth of the seasonal cycle.

The Golden Bough however is not the only factor in the transformation from the daydream Marob of the early play to the fully realised corn kingdom of the novel; there is also the work of the

1. J.G.Frazer The Golden Bough Chapter IV.

Cambridge School of Anthropology. Jane Harrison, Francis Cornford, Gilbert Murray and A.B.Cook, the principal members of the "school", were all classicists, deriving their approach to Greek culture from Frazer.¹ But Frazer had operated from the standpoint of a rational evolutionist, referring frequently to "the savage mind"; the Cambridge School worked in a different intellectual climate. As Jane Harrison stated in her introduction to Themis (1912), possibly the school's central work,

Primitive religion was not, as I had drifted into thinking, a tissue of errors leading to mistaken conduct; rather it was a web of practices² emphasising particular parts of life

Harrison identified a "stream of vitality" in Greek religion which began with the primitive, daimonic or xthonic powers and then re-emerged, by-passing the Olympians, in the mystery religions. The basis of these cults was participation in a rite or action, representative of the communal psyche. Following Levy-Bruhl, she saw this "participation mystique"³ evoked most often in dance, as the essence of magic. Religion and art (notably, in the work of Gilbert Murray, the Greek drama) were interpreted as self-reflective abstractions from these magical representations, serving the same purpose, namely, the

1. A great deal of information about Greek religion can be gleaned from Frazer's translation of and commentary on Pausanias (Pausanias the Traveller (London, 1898)). Mitchison used this edition for many details of geographical and archaeological settings but it is also the springboard for Frazer's anthropological ideas.

2. J.E.Harrison Themis (Cambridge, 1912) p.xii.

3. L. Levy-Bruhl Les Fonctions Mentales dans les societies inferieures translated as How Natives Think (New York, 1925) and La Mentalite Primitive (1922) translated as Primitive Mentality translated L.A.Clare (London, 1923). For a general account of the Cambridge School's view of the relationship between the collective psychology and art see J.E.Harrison Ancient Art and Ritual (Oxford, 1913).

expression of "emotion towards life." Myth, which also expressed existential emotion, mediated between ritual and art, being based directly on the former and inspiring the latter.

The key concept in Harrison's analysis of Greek religion was the Eniautos-Daimon or Year-god, substantially a version of Frazer's Vegetation Spirit, and equally pervasive. Sculpture, drama, athletic contests, the mystery gods, the hero cults and kingship were all traced back to the rituals of the Daimon. There is little doubt that Naomi Mitchison's reading of Frazer and her interpretation of Greek culture were affected by Harrison's ideas. The following passage from 'Themis' could be a commentary on the thematic structure of 'The Corn King' and points towards the union of Marob, Sparta and Egypt on which the novel's resolution hinges.

The hero on examination turns out to be, not a historical great man who happens to be dead, but a dead ancestor performing his due functions as such, who may in particular cases happen to have been a historical great man. As hero he is a functionary; he wears the mask and absorbs the ritual of an Eniautos-Daimon. The myths of the heroes of Athens, from Cecrops to Theseus, show them as kings, that is functionaries, and, in primitive terms, these functionaries assume snake-form. 1

Harrison continues with three sentences which encapsulate Naomi Mitchison's central theme of kings who die for their people.

The daimon-functionary represents the permanent life of the group. The individual dies, but the group and its incarnation the king survive. 'Le roi est mort, vive le roi'. 2

1. J.E.Harrison Themis (Cambridge, 1912) p.xviii.

2. Ibid., p.xviii.

Finally Harrison links this idea with the idea of reincarnation, prominent in Egyptian religion, and, through totemism, with primitive fertility cults such as Marob's.

From these two facts of group permanence and individual death, arose the notion of reincarnation, 'palingenesia'. Moreover, since the group included plants and animals as well as human members, and these were linked by a common life, the rebirth of ancestors and the renewed fertility of the earth went on 'pari passu'. ' 1

This summarised anthropological account provides the background of primitive belief which supports the strange events surrounding Kleomenes' death; it is towards the same collocation of ideas in literary form that our analysis is working.

The Cambridge School cannot be taken in isolation but it is a useful medium through which to view the influence of some major trends of contemporary thought on Naomi Mitchison. Jane Harrison's emphasis on the daimonic or Dionysian as opposed to the rational or Apolline elements in Greek thought derives directly from Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy (1872). Her espousal of the Dionysian cause led to some disagreement within the "school" since Gilbert Murray advanced a far more positive appraisal of the Olympian deities² and their role in the development of civilisation, and Harrison accordingly modified her views, albeit reluctantly.³ Underlying this tension is an ambivalence

1. J.E.Harrison Themis (Cambridge, 1912) p.xviii.

2. Gilbert Murray Five Stages of Greek Religion (New York, 1912).

3. J.E.Harrison Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (Cambridge, 1921).

about the idea of progress. The Cambridge School was crucial in the movement towards a higher evaluation of the primitive, but unlike the later Diffusionist school of thought, they did not abandon the idea of progress.

This position is utterly characteristic of Naomi Mitchison. Intellectually she is an heir of the nineteenth-century liberal rationalists but her own imaginative elan led her to an appreciation of the irrational and its role in human life. Thus in The Corn King and the Spring Queen the primitive state is not idealised: there is unnecessary cruelty and violence in Marob and the political structure is much in need of the Greek ideals of justice and wise rule. At the same time the freedom and unconscious release of Marob is sadly lacking in the severities of Spartan dedication. Similarly, in the novel's resolution there is uncertainty about what Tarrik and Erif's quest has actually achieved for Marob: has it simply enabled it to remain as before or has there been some significant development?

Again Jane Harrison was much influenced by the thought of the French philosopher, Henri Bergson,¹ whose concepts of duree, the underlying, indivisible and yet ceaselessly changing life force, and of the late and conditional nature of consciousness, seemed to match the Dionysian and Apolline traits respectively. There are marked parallels between the fiction of Naomi Mitchison and Bergson's

1. Henri Bergson L'Evolution Creative (1907) translated as Creative Evolution translated by A. Mitchell (London, 1911).

philosophy, notably the sense of life as a process of constant movement and change which is nevertheless the manifestation of one power of life, perpetually recreating itself. In the natural world this power shows itself in evolution; in the world of man it emerges in cultural variety - artefacts, life-styles, systems of thought, psychological patterns, artistic syntheses and religious ideas. Yet all of these creations are secondary and relative; they have barely captured a fixed impression of the life force when it has already moved on, throwing up some new configuration. Mitchison sees this process on the individual level too: the personality emerges from the unconscious but the forms or life-stages which it achieves are subject to constant adaptation and change matching the physical forces of growth and decay. But as Harrison had established, through ritual and symbol man can evoke the durée and by magical or mystical participation renew his own communal and individual life. This is the psychological ambience in which Naomi Mitchison's festivals and characters must be set.

Emile Durkheim,¹ another thinker who contributes to the revolution in man's understanding of primitive society at this time, is also relevant. His thesis that "among primitive peoples, religion reflects collective feeling and collective thinking" is a cornerstone of Jane Harrison's work. Religion according to Durkheim is based on "the idea of society"; through ritual and cult it expresses that idea and in its turn generates the sense of communality without which society could

1. Emile Durkheim Les Formes Elementaires de la Vie Religieuse (1912) translated as The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life translated J.W. Swain (London and New York, 1915).

not properly be said to exist. This is a humanistic view of religion but not an altogether reductive one for, in Durkheim's terms, religion operates in the realm of the sacred and the ideal which, though dependent on its social basis, possesses its own dynamic and internal cohesion. Indeed religious constructs can in their turn change society.

This model for the interpretation of religion coincides exactly with Naomi Mitchison's practice. Fascinated by religion, her novels, not least The Corn King, betray considerable imaginative insight into the cultural and emotional role of religion as reflected in ritual, myth, legend and symbol, but as a rationalist she is distrustful of the dogmatic and hieratic aspects of religion. For her religion is a human phenomenon, though an immensely significant one in the overall pattern of existence. The Corn King is distinguished by a humanistic, religious imagination which works on the premise that the religious life is, in Durkheim's phrase, "the eminent form and as it were the concentrated expression of the whole collective life." In this Mitchison exemplifies a generation of Oxford and Cambridge agnostics such as Aldous Huxley who while sympathising with the rationalist critique of religion wished to preserve the religious consciousness for civilisation.¹

Durkheim also outlined the history of epistemology as the emergence of rational thought from the collective representation of myth and ritual by a gradual process of individualisation and abstraction.² This

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1. See, for example, Aldous Huxley The Perennial Philosophy (London, 1946).
 2. Emile Durkheim Representations Individuelles et Representations Collectives (1898) reproduced in Sociologie et Philosophie (Paris, 1924).

is the philosophical correlative of the Cambridge School's theories about the origins of drama and sculpture in ritual. For Durkheim rites and myths are, as Harrison also argues, the first stages in this process of self-reflection. This epistemology dovetails with the emergence into self-consciousness of the Corn King and Spring Queen of Marob who under the tutelage of stoic philosophy, suffer an increasingly troubled separation from their communal identities as expressed in the Marob rituals.

Naomi Mitchison's use of these historical, philosophical, anthropological and sociological ideas in the literary creation of Marob's communal celebrations and rites, is highly effective. Not only does she deploy resource and inventiveness in order to reconstruct her own distinctive cultural forms but she interweaves these constructions with the major themes of the novel.

The first Marob festival is the autumn bull festival. This event serves a practical economic purpose in that the bulls are slain to reduce the demand on winter fodder and to provide meat. In The Golden Bough the bull is one of the animals in which the Corn Spirit can be embodied,¹ so the bull festival can also be seen as a slaying of the Vegetation Spirit at the end of the growing season. If this seems to duplicate the harvest festival it is because the bull festival is a legacy of the Cimmerians' nomadic and pastoral life, still

1. J.G.Frazer The Golden Bough Chapter XLVIII.

preserved in the move to summer pastures, in contrast to the settled, agricultural harvest festival. In terms of literary recreation it is the Spanish bullfights on which Mitchison leans although she perceives in the contemporary practice its more primitive origins.

The scene is set with a descriptive vigour which is an important element in Mitchison's style.

Erif Der leaned out of her window and watched them driving the bulls into the flax market. The openings of the streets and the house doors and lower windows were barred across, because of the half-wild beasts pouring in, tossing heads and tails, brown and white in the sunlight, not angry yet, but ready to be. Snow had fallen the week before and been cleared away; now it was a lovely, sharp, windy morning. The well-head in the middle was covered over with hurdles to make a raised refuge place for the branders and killers. They stood about on it, some ten or twenty young men Tarrik was among them, standing right on top of the hurdles, with gold and red ivory scales sewn all over his clothes and the long plaited whip hanging from his hand to the ground; he jerked his arm up and cracked it out over the bulls' backs.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen pp.91-2)

The effectiveness of this description lies in the basic simplicity of syntax and diction which allows full weight to be given to each poetic effect. Colour words are important: "brown and white in the sunlight", "gold and red ivory scales", "snow had fallen". These clear-cut contrasts are matched by Erif's sensations - "now it was a lovely, sharp, windy morning." Other sensations cluster around the violence lurking in the atmosphere which is indicated in strong phrases with a concentration of stressed syllables, consonantal clusters and alliteration.

The well-head in the middle was covered over with hurdles to make a raised refuge place for the branders and killers.

This can be compared with the "long, plaited whip" which Tarrik jerks and cracks; the passage moves towards this picture of Tarrik at its centre.

These latent tensions are built up until they find release in open violence.

The bulls were beginning to get angry now, swinging their great heads and bellowing; but so far they had kept clear of the men at the well-head, knowing the sound of whip cracks and the gadfly bite that always followed. The people watching all round began throwing stones and shouting. One of the bulls charged suddenly, horns down, at a house wall, but then, at the last moment, swerved aside and came blundering back into the herd. Two women in the window screamed and one of them called shrill to a boy among the branders, who yelled back and shot out his whip-lash and flicked the flank of the bull, angering him. In another ten minutes the show was at its height

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen pp.92-3)

The phrases shorten and quicken as the emotions of man and animal, man and woman react on each other in a spiralling excitement. The communal ecstasy is centred on Tarrik who waits till the slaughter is in full swing before he moves in; he is the prima donna mateador and his killings are sacrificial.

As the strain came, he heaved himself back on the rope, feeling his strength and godhead burn down through muscles of arm and back and legs to his quick feet hard on the rammed earth of the market place. The bull fell, kicking with all four of its hoofs like knives, and he was onto it and banged it between the eyes with the bronze knob of his whip. The shouting all round rose to a yell for him; he heard his own name and thrilled to it and stuck his knife deep into the bull's throat.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.93)

Through this act, Tarrik is submerged in the impersonal, irrational ecstasy of the group of which he is the focus; he is aware only through his body ("muscles of arm and back and legs"), and in his one flash of consciousness responds to his own name as if he were an individual responding to the name of a god.

Erif too is engaged with forces greater than her individual self although her relationship with them is far more personal than that of Tarrik: her own identity is not swamped but exposed. She is locked in a conflict between her husband and her father.

'She wished that she could stay still now, frozen, unthinking, unpicturing, instead of being horribly alive to it all, in the middle of this magic she had made herself, and that she knew was well made. She gathered it up against Tarrik and let it go; at any rate she was in her father's house; why need she feel that there was any change between last winter and this?

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.92)

The change is that she has become Tarrik's wife, but much of her irrational self is still rooted in unquestioning girlhood, functioning within pre-ordained familial structures, and undisturbed by her new conscious personality with its own demands of loyalty and love.

Erif Der shut her eyes; she did not choose to see it happen Then her mind split into two; one half worked quite free of the magic - the most living half; it darted about, hovering over faces remembered Tarrik. Tarrik. Tarrik. There he was solid at the end of all the paths that darting mind could take.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen pp.94-5)

Tarrik is saved from the bewitchment by the alertness and decisiveness of the Greek philosopher, Sphaeros, who races through the bulls and calling Tarrik by his Greek name, tells him to "wake" and

"think". No-one else can act since they are all caught up in the communal emotion which, once set in train, must run its course, regardless of the results. Only an appeal to the Greek side of Tarrik's nature, to his emergent self-awareness, can break the spell.

The conflicts in Marob between king and council and between the youthful and unthinking sexual pride of Tarrik and Erif, whose first union represents, like the rape motif in myth, an irruption of the unconscious into personal life, has prompted a painful birth of adult self-consciousness with which the traditional life patterns of Marob cannot cope. For the royal couple this results in a severe dislocation of their communal personas from their inner selves. Tarrik follows the clues offered by Greek self-awareness with the stumbling over-emphasis of the convert, seeking "a wisdom, a way of life and action and government". He develops a sense of individual guilt which at times boomerangs in bouts of cruelty and violence, and he confuses appearance and reality so that nothing seems stable any more. Yet he is set on a course of self-discovery; "his mind had come awake and cloudless, and gone south, searching down a secret road - towards Hellas". (The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.97)

Erif's state is less confused but more traumatic. Her magic comes back on her leaving her at odds with her natural instinctive self. Nerrish her mother, who had been a wise witch, is already dead, and when her own child is murdered the anchors of her personality come adrift. The clear, rational light of Greece holds no allure for her and she comes to mistrust the things which previously seemed most real to her.



'It's better to be one of the others, just one of Marob, not separated. Things wouldn't matter; Marob goes on. If we are witches we are ourselves, standing all alone. Outside things matter and we have to find out which are real and the ones we must deal with. And I have found out that the things which do matter and are real are the bad things, the cruel things! Much good magic is to me!'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.251)

In this condition Erif can give Tarrik no support in his attempt to come to terms with the Greek experience, as presented by Sphaeros, and their marriage suffers in consequence.

Initially however the return of the Corn King and the Spring Queen from Greece stabilises the situation in Marob and their Plowing Eve rites are a success. In Frazer's calendar, Plowing Eve is a Spring and sowing festival, but it is also, like Midsummer and Harvest in 'The Corn King', a dancing festival. Jane Harrison's Themis begins as an extended analysis of the Hymn of the Kouretes, an ecstatic dancing song, in worship^{of} the earth goddess Rhea; for her dance is the cardinal form of social expression in a primitive society, and the origin of drama. The dance was believed not only to stimulate the earth's reproductive energies but to signify membership of the social group: to play one's role in the dance is to participate in society.

Naomi Mitchison's Plowing Eve is a three part dramatic exposition of these theories. First there is the actual ploughing ceremony, then a symbolic drama and finally a general dance and orgy. In the first part the Spring Queen waits immobile in the centre of the untilled field while the Corn King circles round about calling out to her. The

exchange of ritual banter between them is a clear example of Mitchison's originality and inventiveness in handling the ideas and outlines of the anthropologists.

"After a time he began to talk to the Spring Queen in the middle, over his shoulder, in a loud, impersonal voice.

'He talked about the plowing. He said: 'This is my field, mine.' He said: 'Other things are mine. Everything I think of is mine, everything I name. Under the plow. They go under. The plow is a ship. It goes through thick water. It is bringing gold to Marob. I am the plow. It is my body. It is hard and strong. It leaps on the closed sod and plunges through. Soon comes the seed.' And every time he said one of these things the crowd would sigh after him: 'Plow hard! Plow deep!'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.241)

The rhythm of these short phrases imitates the motion of the ploughing, as it were, between breaths. Tarrik is completely at one with the "hard and strong" rhythm in his role as King, as Corn and as Male, working in an unhurried way towards a state of raised consciousness among the people. The phrases refer to the sources of their livelihood, the seasons and the all-important corn trade, and the paragraph reaches its climax in their response, " 'Plow hard! Plow deep!' "

There is also a note of masculine challenge in the King's words, " 'This is my field' ", and it is to this that the Queen replies.

'Though you plow the field it is not your field. Why should the field hear? The closed soil has no pleasure of the plow, and cold and hard it will be to the seed. Why should the spring come?'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.241)

Erif speaks for the feminine aspect of humanity and of nature. Her remarks are just as stylised as Tarrik's but their rhythm is gentler, the phrases longer, suggesting that nature, though resistant, will be

won over. The crowd catches on to this note of hope in their response.

But the people of Marob cried at her softly from the edges of the field: 'Spring Queen, be kind, be kind!'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.241)

Though the communal responses impose a certain structure on the exchange, it is free of ritual formulae. This is characteristic of the Marob festivals which are controlled by custom and precedent, but at the same time embody the free expressiveness of Marob's culture. Further, as will become clear, they are open to innovation and development. Perhaps this can be justified on the grounds of realism in that Marob is a society exposed to the pressures of historical change, but more essentially it reflects the way in which Mitchison uses these anthropological ideas symbolically, in order to represent a certain state of mind, as well as empirically, in order to portray a particular kind of society. On either count there is no attempt to depict a typical primitive society: Marob is unapologetically 'sui generis'.

The Plowing Eve narrative as a whole conforms to a pattern of restraint and release. The bridled expectancy of the ploughing ends when Erif is won over and responds.

'Suddenly Erif Der was unreasonably and beautifully glad. Her voice, as the crowd was hoping it would, grew louder. She was the Spring'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.243)

The Corn has won over the earth, man nature, by persuading the growing season to begin once more. The festival can now proceed to

the courting of the maiden whose coldness has been overcome. This is represented in a symbolic courting dance of the King and the Queen, the Corn and the Spring. After the bustle of constructing a booth there is a lapse into restraint and anticipation. The dance is formal and drawn out. The accompanying drums and bagpipes, and the hand-clapping of the crowd marks the pace as it quickens towards the climax of the dance, the symbolic union of the sacred couple. The people then rush in to seize some talisman of the renewed fertility, which is the Queen's bounty.

The courting dance is an imitation of a bird's mating display.

Sometimes one or both of them spun round and round. When the Spring Queen did this the wool flowers on her dress flew out in a curious widening shower and then, as she stilled, folded themselves back on her. Sometimes the Corn King just jumped, by himself, as some sort of birds do, showing off to their mates.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.244)

Apart from illustrating the eclecticism which Mitchison employs in filling out the basic anthropological forms, this description is a good example of the ease with which she moves between human and animal behaviour. There is something of biological observation in this but also an attempt to convey humanistically the state of mind for which totemism is an accepted reality - the world of the psyche and the world of nature coterminous. Thus the metamorphoses at the conclusion of the novel are not entirely isolated events but are linked to an imaginative current which runs through the novel.

After the symbolic sexual union of the King and Queen, the sacredness of the festival becomes increasingly diffused, as drama

gives way to dance and dance to orgy. Release becomes the dominant mood. The dance is a sun dance of the kind instanced by Frazer as a Midsummer custom - a wheel with torches at the edge and Tarrik in the middle as himself the sun - but the wheel soon breaks up and the merrymaking begins. The orgy too has both a magical and a social purport in that it relaxes the normal restraints in a general catharsis which in turn strengthens society. Further the sacred and the everyday, the seasons and human life, godhead and society are merged with no sense of disjunction: Marob renews itself by participation in the continuing life stream.

There is nevertheless a note of personal disharmony. Erif is eased into her role by her pregnancy which gives her one reality to hold on to, but as she watches the dance she recalls the disruptions of the previous year and wonders whether the seasons are really influenced. Tarrik ends the night brooding on the contrast between the permanency of the seasons and Marob's communal life, and the fragility of his own identity.

He began also to try and count up how many more times, with the best of luck, this would happen But once you look at a thing and see it is finite, how very little that extra three or four times matters! He used not to mind, used not to think of himself as anything apart from Marob, which went on for ever. It was the Greek part of him standing up and whispering. The Corn King would always be there, but Tarrik only for a few more years.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.248)

The Midsummer festival is a celebration of fullness and growth at the height of the season. Again it is an amalgam of many cultural

elements unified by Naomi Mitchison's conception of Marob as a particular society. The overall effect is that of a carnival with tremendous colour and an emphasis on decoration, especially flowers. There is a cow garlanded with flowers, a procession with the Spring Queen in a bedecked cart, and a bear which Tarrik leads about on a string. The whole extravaganza is followed by a market.

For this compendium Naomi Mitchison draws not just on Frazer's festival of the summer solstice (both cow and bear can be embodiments of the Corn Spirit)¹ but on her own contemporary knowledge of folklore. Frazer himself had combined the approach of comparative anthropology with that of folklore by drawing on surviving customs as evidence for his universalist theories; Mitchison's use of folklore is more a matter of personal response than of academic observation.² From an early age she was fascinated by the local customs of the, then, traditional community at Auchterarder where the Haldanes had their family base and summer holidays. The Auchterarder environment of Cloan provided a release and means of expression for her childhood fantasies which Oxford lacked, because it retained a vein of living symbolism, as this early poem shows.

1. J.G.Frazer The Golden Bough Chapter LXII.

2. Nevertheless she was also well placed to be abreast of intellectual developments. Andrew Lang, the noted folklorist, was a family friend of the Haldanes and an early correspondent and critic of Naomi Mitchison. Lang's Custom and Myth (London, 1884) was a key book in establishing folklore as a source of anthropological evidence.

'At the time I was four years old
 I went to glean with the women,
 Working the way they told;
 My eyes were blue like blue-bells,
 Lighter than oats my hair;
 I came from the house of the Haldanes
 Of work and thinking and prayer
 But oh when I went from there,
 In the corn, in the corn, in the corn,
 I was married young to a hare!

'..... And the thing had happened to me
 The day that I went with the gleaners,
 The day that I built the corn-house,
 That is not built with prayer.
 For oh I was clean set free,
 In the corn, in the corn, in the corn,
 I had lived three days with the hare! 1

Travelling later in Britain, Europe and further afield Mitchison continued to absorb and participate in local customs. In this letter of nineteen thirty-three, written after "The Corn King", she describes an event which might have taken place in the pages of the novel.

"We had rather fun yesterday, as it was a Basque festival; there was dancing in all the streets and squares, and decorated carts and lots of people in the rather jolly traditional clothes, girls in red skirts banded with green, green jackets and white caps - and curious artificial plaits made of hemp (no attempt to make them look like real hair), boys in white shirts and red berets and belts. In the evening they came and danced in front of the hotel. The music is drums and pipes, in effect very like bagpipes. All the waitresses were dancing, so by and by I began to dance with them, a kind of schottiche. Then there was a circle dance in which they absorbed Murdoch. Then there was the grand dance, the Baile Basque, and I was suddenly seized upon and carried off into the middle. A man left the ring, bowed and gave me his beret, which I held. Then he danced an extraordinary, slow, elaborate solo dance, with sudden high kicks and jumps in it, gesticulated to the four quarters and then carried off his cap and me into the circle, where I danced with them, between two handkerchiefs, as one usually does in a peasant dance. 2

This folk impulse balances the darker aspects of Mitchison's primitivism with an admixture of light-heartedness, colour and gaiety, while supplementing the implication that the various forms of human culture are manifestations of the same racial energy.

Midsummer is also a dance festival.¹ Tarrik marks out the "house of the year" in the centre of Marob with a symbolism reminiscent of the house of sheaves in the above poem and the house which the Delphic oracle says will stand in the cornfield. At the centre of the house and of the dance is a fertility stone like the omphalos of Delphi² which is decorated with "flax tails" or three limbed crosses representing the sun's motion and the consequent fertility.³ As Tarrik dances he is showered with tokens in what may be a survival of an original sacrifice by stoning. There is also a straw basket into which the power of the sun is bound in order to be released during the winter - an example of the "last sheaf" customs which are well-nigh universal in cereal-growing communities. Finally all the flowers and garlands are burnt in a bonfire, again a common feature of seasonal festivals symbolising, according to Frazer, the death of the Vegetation Spirit, although in this general sun festival it need not bear this interpretation.

The events at Harvest and at the subsequent Plowing Eve highlight

1. J.G.Frazer The Golden Bough Chapter LXII.

2. J.E.Harrison Themis pp.400-15.

3. These widely disseminated three-legged crosses are discussed and illustrated in Themis (p.525-6). Naomi Mitchison probably saw them on Greek coins in the British Museum.

another aspect of primitive dance festivals as utilised by Naomi Mitchison. The dancers might, in the view of contemporary anthropology,¹ be reincarnations of the dead ancestors returned as fertility daimons to renew the racial continuity of the group. This belief underpins the death and reappearance of Harn Der in the Marob rites. Otherwise the Harvest Festival mourns, in Frazer's terms, the death of the Vegetation Spirit. This is represented by a symbolic drama in which Harn Der, the Corn or more specifically the last sheaf, is reaped by Erif who now embodies not just spring but the whole year. In accordance with Frazer's ideas of ritual development,² it is not the sacred king himself who is slain but a specially chosen substitute and even then he is only slain figuratively. However at one time the Corn would have been literally sacrificed, so on one level Erif's act is a reversion to a more primitive form of the Marob rite. A final anthropological borrowing is the Laughing Man whose comic capers turn the mourners from grief and prepare them for the rebirth of the actor and thus of the year. Examples of such figures include Iambe in the Eleusinian mysteries³ who jokes Demeter out of her sorrow, and the comic Doctor in the English Mumming plays.⁴ Like the Doctor, the Laughing Man scorns the womens' grief and boasts of his own medicine or magic, in this case the regenerative sexual power of the male.

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1. See J.L.Weston 'From Ritual to Romance' (Cambridge, 1920) pp.80-1.
 2. J.G.Frazer 'The Golden Bough' Chapters XXIV and XXV.
 3. C.Kerenyi 'Eleusis - Archetypal image of mother and daughter' translated R.Mannheim (London, 1967).
 4. E.K.Chambers 'The Medieval Stage' (Oxford, 1903) Vol.1 p.207 and p.213.

The climax of Mitchison's narrative is the killing of Harn Der. In this instance the feelings of the participants are not submerged: Harn Der is terrified and Tarrik sees with dawning horror what is about to happen. Only Erif seems caught up in the performance, acting out a deeply rooted drama of revenge for the death of her child.

Harn Der and his daughter took hands, and stamped and round and round they whirled, leaning away from each other. His beard touched her face and his hands gripped at hers, trying to send her messages, somehow certain that it was the last chance. But she stamped again and changed direction so that her dress twisted suddenly like a snake round her, and then untwisted and flew out; and she would not accept anything from his body to hers.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.293)

The progress of the rite holds the spectators and the mesmerised victim in its grasp, but there is a sense of some imminent catastrophe which will shatter its impersonality.

So the Spring Queen took the sickle of bronze and gold and the people of Maron saw her lay it lightly on the throat of the other actor in his green rabbit-skins, and this would be the symbol of death and waiting and winter. But Tarrik, watching his wife, saw that she was not going to do the right thing, and his mind fell back in horror from what he had instantaneously known she must be going to do instead.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.293)

The force of the narrative lies in its multiple point of view. There is the fear of Harn Der who "at last looked his daughter in the eyes", Tarrik's realisation, Erif's uncanny absorption as conveyed by the rhythm of the prose, and the crowd voicing the feeling of the community whose welfare is at stake.

Somewhere in the crowd there was a bitter voice which said, dropping like a stone into the deep silence of men waiting to breathe again: 'She has killed the Corn Year. It will not rise again.'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.294)

In order that "It", the Corn actor, will rise again Tarrik has to take the place of the dead corn: the Corn King himself has to adopt the posture of death. This results in a confusion between Tarrik and Harn Der. The Laughing Man is unsure until the last moment who will rise in response to his death-defeating jokes, the old actor or the new, and even Tarrik feels himself shadowed by the presence of Harn Der. Despite his desperate attempts to explain what has happened as Erif's first child, in its role as the New Year, being revenged by the new New Year, the second child, an uncomfortable tangle remains.

.... Harn Der had been the risen corn, and he himself was the risen corn. How, in spite of all his talk to the Council, reconcile these two things? Circumstances had forced him and Harn Der, his enemy, so much together, that for a time they had been the same. If he had been the corn and Harn Der had been the corn, was he Harn Der? How had the baby come in? Which of it all was real?

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.298)

It is hardly unexpected therefore that on the following Plowing Eve, at the vital point when the Corn is about to join in symbolic union with the Spring, it is Harn Der and not Tarrik whom Erif sees. The dead ancestor returns and Erif flees from the booth. Tarrik hurriedly finishes the ceremony with a new Spring Queen but Erif's ritual "luck" is ruined and she must seek purification.

The killing of Harn Der is a nodal event around which several themes cluster. Principally perhaps the events at Harvest reveal the personal unhappiness and dislocation of the royal marriage rebounding on the Marob seasons. Thus the complex of love, hate, violence and death which surrounds the murder of Erif's baby by Harn Der is transferred into the communal ritual.

Why did she still feel the crowd as something critical, broken up into separate men and women who would see things in separate ways? Why was she so much embarrassed by their nearness to her? But she knew why. She knew she was obsessed by something that was for the moment more powerful than her godhead and all Marob pushing her forward to do their work.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.298)

This "obsession" may be interpreted as a father-daughter conflict centred around the incest taboo:¹ the father is jealous of his daughter's lover and kills her child, and she then revenges herself in a bid to free herself of his power - "she had killed her father and Tarrik had saved her life" (The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.298). However the image of Harn Der has not been expunged from Erif's mind; the ancestors must be conciliated, not denied, and her father returns at Plowing Eve.

Erif Der saw with horror and terror her own dead father leap at her. She knew with an immediate grip of the moment and what it brought, that when she had fallen ready for him, it was Harn Der who would sweep aside the Corn King's rags and show himself, Harn Der who would plunge down on her, Harn Der who was the image of God and man and her possessor and master!

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.315)

The killing also has a political aspect since it is Harn Der who leads the opposition to Tarrik in Marob. Even his presence in the play is a manoeuvre of his party on the Council to restore him to favour after the failure of his coup. The metaphysical significance

1. In Totem and Taboo (1912), translated A.A.Brill (London, 1919) Freud argued that the main function of myth was the release of repressed impulses through safe channels and he centred his argument on the incest taboo. The Freudian attitude is that of the rational evolutionist and it is characteristic that Mitchison should accommodate it within her more positive appraisal of myth. Marob is not the Eden of the Diffusionists.

however predominates. Through Harn Der's death the uncertainties of the King and Queen about their own precarious identity is brought into the seasonal cycle with its guarantee of communal immortality. The problem and the challenge are seen immediately by Berris.

"He did not doubt that his sister had broken the cycle of the rite, the thing that was to Marob as a man and woman's cycle of desire and begetting and calm and birth were to them, each naturally arising from each. Erif Der had put in something new and it must be met with something that sprang from it. She had put in death. Must it stay there always, and always be fulfilled as part of the cycle or could there be such a new birth after it that the thing would cancel out?"

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.357)

More concretely, might the Corn King personally have to die before, in the natural way, his powers fail?

Turning back to Sparta, it is now possible to compare how the anthropological ideas of Frazer and the Cambridge School have influenced Naomi Mitchison's treatment of the two cultures. We have already shown how she interprets the Plutarchan narrative of Kleomenes' end as a sacrificial death and how the Greek hero cult is linked up with the Year King and the seasonal cycle. These parallels are present in the body of the Spartan narrative although in an unobtrusive way since the developed consciousness of Greek classical culture stands between Marob and Sparta.

The Cambridge School derived drama from seasonal ritual and this theory is mirrored in the Marob festivals, but it also traced the origins of the Greek games back to primitive fertility cult. A chapter of Themis, contributed by F.M.Cornford, analyses the myths and

customs surrounding the ancient Olympic Games in the light of Harrison's Eniautos-Daimon,¹ and this analysis is evident in the informal Spartan sports described by Naomi Mitchison.

It was all happening in rather a pleasant rocky valley with a piece of flat field in the middle of it. This had once been ploughed, but now it had been let go out of cultivation and the wild stuff was all over it again. At one side of the flat ground was a fairly deep ravine, quite dry now, but the beautiful plane trees that grew out of it showed that there would be water again in another month or two. On the other side were more trees, mostly the low, golden-green pines and between them dark prickly undergrowth with red berries. There were little goat-paths through it, and at their edges larkspur and crowds of violet-scented butterfly cyclamens. The girls picked lapfuls of them to mix in with their crowns, and made themselves necklaces of them Most of them climbed up into the pine trees which grew slantwise with low boughs, and hung the wreaths as they finished them onto the warm, resin-smelling twigs.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.217)

The Olympic Games were held in autumn and this scene is set in autumn, but Cornford characterised the Games as a New Year festival, whose date had been shifted because of a complex adjustment in religious practise, and it is the idea of the New Year which Mitchison develops. The field had "once been ploughed" and "there would be water again in another month or two". The atmosphere of a sacred grove, as at the Games site, also percolates through the narrative with garlanded boughs, the smells of the significantly Evergreen generation and growth, and even the red berries, symbols of fertility.

Cornford identified one of the strata of religious development at

1. J.E.Harrison Themis Chapter VII.

Olympia as a virgin festival dedicated to Hera. This is indicated not only by the maidens in the branches but by Philylla's virginal enthusiasm. It is she who crowns Agiatis and Kleomenes as the Year Queen and King.

The King and Queen walked together under Philylla's tree; she dropped a loose chain of cyclamens, strung head to tail over the Queen's head, then, as they both stopped and looked up, greatly daring she dropped one over the King too She (Agiatis) looked very young in the dappled light under the tree, just as those September cyclamens looked like Spring.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.218)

Agiatis recalls the spirit of the ancient Hera festival when she declares, to Philylla's delight, that some of her girls could match the athletic prowess of the men.

The centre of the festival is the combat of the old year with the new which lies behind the deceptively incidental wrestling match between Panteus, the Kouros, and Kleomenes, the Hero and King. The older man is defeated and this is a sign of the imminent waning of his and Sparta's fortunes, despite the springtime hope of the revolution. This ominous note is only allowed to creep in at the very end of the narrative.

Philylla stood over them and said: 'I am very happy. I've got everything I want. I'm living at the right place at the right time. I love you all.'

'There was a queer silence for a moment while Kleomenes and Agiatis stared at one another in horror, as though some god were approaching whom they could not ward off. Panteus got to his feet and stood and looked across them at her. 'Take care, Philylla,' he said. 'Oh take care or it will be turned against you!'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.220)

The goddess who is liable to be affronted by this presumption of happiness is Themis or Fate who was the strongest power in Greek religion. In Harrison's view Themis was not only the guardian of the wheel or order (Dike) but of the seasonal cycle which predetermines that the old King, Kleomenes and his year, the revolution, must die.¹

This Spartan festival is not as successful, in literary terms, as those of Marob. Partly this is because it is a revival not of the form but of the atmosphere of an older social order, which was more closely tied to religion than the new, so the symbolism is less concrete or socially grounded. Consequently, in addition, the contrast between the awareness of the characters and how the reader is encouraged to interpret the situation is strained. The characters are engaged in a blithe afternoon not entirely unlike the school sports but sex and generation ooze all around them. Mitchison is not good at representing sexual awareness unless her characters are actively caught up in a more than conscious delight: hence the uneasiness of this exchange.

'Do you like them? said the King, pointing out to the runners.
'Oh yes!' said Philylla, 'they're lovely. I do like the colour they are now.'
'You like them best with their clothes off?' said Kleomenes grinning.
'Of course,' she said, and then blushed and tried to pull down her short tunic.'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.218)

There is a more direct correlation between the Marob festivals and the fertility rites of the Spartan Helots in which Erif participates.

1. J.E.Harrison Themis pp.514-535.

Her awareness illuminates and enhances the psychological tones of the narrative since she becomes, within the text, a commentator, relating the anthropological forms to their existential purpose. The Helot celebration is a Harvest festival constructed around the bringing home of the last sheaf. The drama of the Corn is played out as a New Year Mumming with the following characters.

Only five of them, all youngish, were differently dressed; one as a ridiculous soldier in armour of heavily starched and painted linen and a helmet with an enormous black plume, that would only just stay on; another in a white tunic with one garland of roses and myrtle slung across it and a second on his head; another with his head through the middle of a goat skin that was trimmed all round its edges with scarlet knots; the fourth made up as an old grandmother with shawl and limp and sheep's wool hair; and the fifth, a quite beardless boy with merry, sloe-black eyes, in a yellow two wig of short curls and a short white woman's tunic.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.374)

The last two characters are the Dame Jane and Bessy characters of some English village plays - the mother and the maiden again.¹ The garlanded man is a bridegroom and the soldier is the hero or St. George figure, although in this version he is emphatically a mock hero since the whole show is, as Erif sees, "a mockery of Spartan ways and customs, of soldiers and brides." The play is an assertion of the social identity of the Helots as over against the Spartiates with their absurd militarism and their abrupt, uncereemonious habit of marriage by seizure.

1. According to Chambers, all the village festivals from Michelmas to Plough Monday "must be regarded as the flotsam and jetsam" of an original New Year feast. (The Medieval Stage Vol.1, p.249).

The man in the goat-skin is the Corn Spirit who takes the place of the baby and the sheaf in the basket, so that the whole performance can begin again with a new bridegroom. The soldier is killed but not the Corn. Similarly the third part of the festival is an orgy, a sowing to stimulate next year's growth; in Marob this part of the magic is reserved for Spring but as Naereta, the Queen of the festival, tells Erif, "It must be now, because now the corn is cut and killed, so that the new corn-year must be started". (The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.377). The only focus on death in the Helot festival is the sacrifice of the goat as an embodiment of the corn spirit, but the significance of this part of the rite has been forgotten. Erif consequently reflects,

... in this rite of the Helots there was a constant stream of death and life: the dead corn was never reborn, but the new took its place. Perhaps this was reasonable.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.378)

Through this festival Erif's participation in the basic stream of life and fertility is renewed but the Helots can offer nothing to counter the new kind of death which has entered the Marob cycle.

In Alexandria the interest centres more preponderantly than in Marob or Sparta on the anthropological and religious aspects of the cultural portrait. There too there is a stratum of fertility religion which is very ancient. Its worship is based on the Nile floods rather than directly on the corn itself but in the prevailing atmosphere of religious syncretism it has merged with the worship of the mystery goddess Isis and with her mythical consort Osiris. The kindness and femininity of the goddess sets the emotional tenor of the Midsummer festival to which Erif is taken.

They came down over the dried mud to the edge of the river, and then, in a soft, surprising rustle, men and women and children threw out from their baskets into the water, fruit and millet and cakes After that they all walked into the cool bosom of Hapi the Nile, ankle deep, knee deep, waist deep. Ankhet had led Erif by the hand, startled and yet not frightened, but glad to be one of a crowd again. She felt the warm mud oozing about her feet and as they got further out felt the soft tugging of the current about her legs and body. It was all very solemn at first, but soon here and there along the line came shrill, joyful cries and peoples' hands stirred and then their arms, circling, plucking the surface of the water, and the impulse came down on them everywhere, and they all fell to splashing and laughing and crying out happy greetings and blessings to one another and to the dear and kind river.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen pp.569-70)

There is a gentle beauty about this rite with "the soft, surprising rustle", as the offerings are cast into the river, and the steady wading into "the cool bosom" of the water, the source of life. The language conveys each sensation - the "tugging" of the current and the "oozing" of the mud - with a careful clarity which reflects the purity and solemnity of the occasion. The reader feels the emotions of the rite because, in Mitchison's hands, it becomes a heightening and focussing of the ordinary sensations experienced by anyone walking gradually into warm water: first the stillness, then the tentative, exploratory movements ("peoples' hands stirred, and then their arms ..."), and finally the inevitable outbreak of energy and, in the religious context, joy.

Although the douce respectability of her Alexandrian hosts prevents Erif from participating in the subsequent celebrations, this event coincides with the beginning of her healing. It is a release

from troubled introspection and a baptism into the faith of a goddess whom Erif had first heard about in Sparta -

Isis, the women's goddess, the pure mother,
the gentle one who still kept in her heart
the pain of earth, who would stand for ever
between women and chaos, guide their souls
with her hands.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.361)

The religious situation in Egypt was historically extremely complex.¹ To Frazer it presented the whole range of cults from primitive fertility magic to the magic of the disembodied soul, reincarnation and the higher mysteries of religion. The Pharaohs of Egypt were worshipped as gods, incarnations of Amon, who at death entered into the mystery of the dying and rising god, Osiris, and his consort Isis. This official religion was closely related to the fertility cults of the Egyptian peasants but in the urban, cosmopolitan environment of Alexandria it was further developed in two different ways. On the one hand the Ptolemaic dynasty, Macedonian in origin, turned it into an imperial cult modelled on that of Alexander the Great, thus evolving an intenser form of the common Hellenistic phenomenon of king worship. Simultaneously the worship of Isis and Osiris came under the emotional influence of the Eastern mystery religions such as that of Adonis and later, by way of Greece, the cult of Dionysius. In an attempt to harness this new religious force to public ends, the Ptolemeys established the cult of Serapis who was essentially a fusion

1. My account is based on Rostovtsev's chapter "Ptolemaic Egypt" in the Cambridge Ancient History Vol. VII The Hellenistic Monarchies and the Rise of Rome .

of Osiris with the newer gods and who also had Isis for his consort. Hellenistic king worship was largely an official matter, but in the emotional afflatus of the mystery cults and the decadence of a post-classical individualism gone bad, it is not inconceivable that a Ptolemey might, like Mitchison's Ptolemey, begin to take his divine role personally. Certainly a notorious Roman emperor behaved in a not dissimilar way.

Naomi Mitchison employs the religious variety of Alexandria in order to intertwine the faiths of Marob and Sparta and the "emotions towards life" which they express in the one place. Egypt provides an empirical grounding for the universalism implicit in the novel since it is both Greek and barbarian while possessing its own distinctive existential wisdom.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CORN KING AND THE SPRING QUEEN - II

The historical perspective shaping Naomi Mitchison's fiction is that of the biological evolutionist for whom the six thousand or so years of human culture are set against the vast background of man's gradual emergence from nature. Thus, rapid though the pace of development has been, human nature has altered little in these six thousand years. This doctrine is not the same as that of the unchanging human heart for it does not rule out the possibility of important psychical and even physical change in the future (possibilities that become actualities in Mitchison's science fiction), but its consequences for the novelist are similar. The human beings of the third century B.C. are substantially the same as those of the twentieth A.D..¹

This idea about history is reflected in the kind of characters which people Mitchison's books. History is humanised because its instruments are very ordinary human beings - parents, children and old people - whose personal relationships form the continuum of existence. Sometimes, when the individual concerned is an actual historical figure - Pindar or Paul or Sphaeros - there is a deliberate playing off against accepted notions of historical personages: Pindar appears as a passionate eccentric, Sphaeros as an increasingly out-of-touch old man. There is little sense in Naomi Mitchison's fiction of the

1. See Naomi Mitchison The Kingdom of Heaven (London 1939), Chapter 1, pp.1-10.

strangeness and mystery of individuality, but rather a lively ringing of the changes on basic character types, all of which are informed by her comic view of average human nature. The principal characters form a separate case since as well as being ordinary human beings they are the bearers of communal significance and, in a few cases, the locus of authorial viewpoint; but Mitchison's standard, eminently recognisable characters form one important bridge between the past and the present in her fiction.

Another factor which endorses Naomi Mitchison's idea of the continuity of past and present and which underpins her presentation of character, is the use of colloquial language. When Mitchison began to write historical novels in the early nineteen twenties, it was still the convention to archaise the dialogue. Without at the outset giving the matter much thought she wrote her stories in contemporary prose and put colloquial speech, even slang, into the mouths of her characters. As "The Spectator" commented in a review of The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931), "Her people shall speak as we do or not at all."¹

As her thinking about history developed Naomi Mitchison expanded on this original instinct. In the diary of her trip to Russia in nineteen thirty-one, she related an encounter with a Soviet archaeologist, Orbelli.

1. Anonymous review The Spectator June 6, 1931.

His great idea is that anyone dealing with a culture must know the language and be in touch with everything about a place, not just its pots or carpets or whatever. 1

A fuller discussion of this approach appears in the notes to The Bull Calves (1947).

Any historical novelist needs to think out a definite convention over the speech of his characters and the language used for descriptive writing between conversations. In my novels of the ancient world I have transcribed Latin, Greek or whatever it may be, into current English using slang or debased forms when it seemed that this was the best way of giving the reader the feel of how people were talking. Sometimes indeed I overdid this, using a transient slang, which has now dated that bit of the book. While writing I needed to keep an edge of my thought parallel with the original language so as to try and get as near as might be to ancient ways of thought with the deep influence that phrasing and words must have on ways of thinking. 2

The thoroughness of method described in this passage belongs to a later stage of thought and practice than that of The Corn King but it does throw light on the ideals towards which Naomi Mitchison was working. At points in the novel there are revelations of something very Greek in the texture of the prose. One such moment is when Philylla and Erif go to the temple of Artemis in order to take the omens.

'Does Artemis help you?'
'Not exactly that,' said Philylla, 'but it turns my luck if it needs turning. It shows I am not careless or proud. Fate has all the gods in her net. We believe she is justice too. She cannot

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1. Naomi Mitchison Russian Diary (unpublished) p.45.
 2. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.408.

be looked at too close so the gods come between us and her lest we should see to madness. They show us if we ask them a little of what is happening, beyond appearances.'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.370)

One could go through this passage identifying the Greek concepts which are being translated - careless: asebeia, proud: ubris, Fate: Themis, justice: dike, and appearances: phantasia. In addition a good impression is conveyed of the rhythms of Greek and thus of the impulses behind Greek religion. However this passage is not fully representative; the dominant effect of the language in The Corn King is to translate the past directly into the present of contemporary English society.

In the case of the third century B.C., Hellenistic world in which The Corn King is set Mitchison's equation of past and present was encouraged by a general opinion among historians that there were many parallels between the Hellenistic period and the contemporary world. Thus Volume VIII of the Cambridge Ancient History, published in nineteen twenty-eight portrays the Hellenistic age as one of experiment and change following the collapse of an older social order through disunity and war.¹ On the one hand this resulted in a movement towards cosmopolitanism with the growth of "super-states", "mass-culture", syncretism in religion and the emergence of universal philosophies based on an ideal unity of all men. At the same time both the mystery cults and the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies

1. Cambridge Ancient History Vol.VII The Hellenistic Monarchies and the Rise of Rome, Chapter 2 "The Leading Ideas of the Period" contributed by W.S.Ferguson.

nurtured an introspective mentality foreign to the age of the Greek city-state. Writing to Naomi Mitchison in nineteen twenty-nine, the historian W.W.Tarn went so far as to state,

So far as I understand it, the third-century outlook was quite different from that of the fifth; it always seems to me, with the necessary reservations, to be in many ways more modern, more like the present world, than anything that ever happened again. 1

Whether this opinion is accurate or not (the Cambridge enterprise was itself a historical event), a novelist, already thus predisposed, was given sanction to weave the past and the present into one fabric.

The interweaving of past and present in the novel does not provide an allegorical interpretation in which each of the historical cultures can be matched up against the modern equivalent. However, Mitchison's kind of historical imagination ranges over the whole field of human culture, drawing on one period in order to help reconstruct another. This is possible because, despite her disciplined attempts to work from the material basis of a culture, her main interests lie in the moral and psychological qualities of a given people, period or creed. The premise of this approach is that such moral and psychological qualities recur.

Sparta has elements of both the middle-class luxury which characterises the states of the Achaean league, and of a revolutionary socialist state. There is an obvious analogy with twentieth-century Russia as, at the time of writing, the type of socialist revolution,

1. Unpublished letter from W.W.Tarn to Naomi Mitchison, June 7 1929.

but the likenesses to twentieth-century English society are more tangible. The Spartan Helots speak like the English working-class and provide domestic and farm labour for the Spartiates, who speak like the English upper middle-class. The Spartan renewal is closely connected with Stoic philosophy which is reminiscent, in its practical effects, of the English public school system with boys sent away to the traditional "classes" and family life sacrificed to duty and the public realm. The two poles of this analogy are linked through the common factor of Puritanism which is seen as a recurring psychological type. Art is neglected and there is an unbending emphasis on what is ultimately real - the "kataleptike phantasia" which is taken up as a motif into the general scheme of the novel. Behind all is a sense of the Absolute, of God as the central fire. Thus Stoicism begins as a system of natural philosophy which is how Tarrik first encounters it, moves into the area of moral imperatives, and then generates a religious world view. It is however essentially an individualistic philosophy; Sphaeros' moral scruples cannot coexist with Kleomenes' political pragmatism.

The other Greece of art, pleasure of the senses and rational delight is associated with Athens and with the Epicurean philosophy. Like Stoicism Epicureanism was an individualistic philosophy. Despite its aggressive rationalism in matters religious, it too is identified by Naomi Mitchison as akin to a religious type - the Hellenistic cults of mercy, love and brotherhood.¹ In terms of twentieth-century

1. "The ideas of brotherhood and love, both theoretical and practical had been floating about the Hellenistic world for several centuries. They had perhaps been most clearly expressed by Epicurus of Athens" . Naomi Mitchison The Kingdom of Heaven (London, 1939) p.37.

European society Hyperides the Epicurean is a liberal individualist with a philosophy not dissimilar to that of the famous sixth chapter of George Moore's Principia Ethica (1903) which stresses personal love, knowledge and aesthetic emotion as the ideal ends of life. Both Berris and, in a modified way Tarrik, eventually align themselves with this attitude to life.

Both Sparta and Athens then embody ways of life which present possible answers to the question "what is the good?", the question typical of European rationality and self-consciousness which began with the Greeks. Each society is measured against an ideal standard, a blend of Plato's Republic and the Kingdom of God, and found wanting.

All my life I have looked for the just society since as a child I sat on the back of the dining-room sofa reading Plato's "Republic". I had felt that without justice there could be no real civilisation. I had turned my mind on Athens, not only the historical Athens but 'all that we mean by Athens', and on the other parts of the ancient world. Then I began to think that love was even more necessary: 'When people are friends there is no need of justice between them'. Yet must it not be more than this, beyond the dear city of Cecrops to the dear city of God? I looked at all the Utopias. It had seemed to me that the shadow of the Just Society (which I now put in capitals as the City of Godhead) had lighted momentarily on one group or another, in the vision of one man or woman or another, all down the centuries. But the Godhead flickers away, leaves the society or part of a society less than good, less than just. 1

What of Marob? It is a distinctive variation on the type of the communal society and represents, in the moral scheme of the novell, the

1. Naomi Mitchison Return to the Fairy Hill (London, 1966) pp.86-87.

pattern which makes for happiness, the irrational aspects of love, sex, ecstasy and delight without which human life remains unfulfilled. However the irrational in itself is not enough for it is morally ambiguous and can lead to cruelty and violence. Antithetically, all the rational philosophies must, in Naomi Mitchison's view, return to the irrational if they are to be complete and fulfilling and provide ultimately a pattern which makes for happiness. It is these contradictions which Erif and Tarrik struggle to resolve.

In terms of the European culture of that period, Marob is one sign of a remarkable upsurge of interest in the primitive, and echoes at points the work and ideas of D.H. Lawrence. Like Lawrence, Mitchison stresses the role of the leader and of the irrational in society, yet on consideration it is the differences between Mitchison and the contemporary mood that are most interesting.¹ Despite her concern with passion and its unconscious roots, Mitchison takes a much lighter view of sex itself, placing her emphasis on the relationships of parenthood and marriage as grounded in the psyche. Sex is not, as it often is in Lawrence, separated from the family and generation, although, because Mitchison diverts her seriousness into these areas, she is a lot less puritanical about the sexual act itself. In Marob sexual

1. In 1930 Naomi Mitchison was asked by F.V. Morley, a director of Faber and Faber, to contribute a pamphlet to their "Miscellany" series on the emotional problems resulting from the changes in sexual mores. This pamphlet which appeared as Comments on Birth Control (London, 1930) was designed by Morley to be a reply to an earlier pamphlet in the series written by D.H. Lawrence, their disagreement being about the role of conscious knowledge in matters sexual. My discussion is directed at this stage towards the literary work of the two authors rather than their polemics.

intercourse is a means of celebration, sensation and communication to be used in a free, friendly and experimental way. In addition sexual relationships, although potentially passionate, are imbued with a personal intimacy or fondness for which the severer Lawrence would have had little sympathy.

On the other hand, in The Corn King¹, the experience of passion tends to be a temporary one, a descent into the unconscious, which completely overrides the conscious personality. It is a godhead or form of possession which dictates the behaviour of the possessed. In Lawrence passion is a quality which, though heightened in specific experiences, should inform and mould the conscious self. There is an uneasy split in Mitchison between moral awareness and irrationality, which lends a forced air of over-emphasis to some of her descriptions of physical sex. Perhaps some of her talk of "bellies and nipples and thighs" is an imitation of Lawrence but it is not an entirely successful imitation because her working concept of the primitive or the unconscious is different from Lawrence's.

The truth is that Naomi Mitchison's love affair with the irrational is qualified by her allegiance to the idea of Christian love. The free play of emotion in Marob allows for personal love of a kind that is suppressed in Sparta. Between Essro and Erif, and among the group of friends surrounding Tarrik and Erif there are, despite disruptive pressures, strong bonds of loyalty, kindness and fellowship. It is because Hyperides the Epicurean understands such fellow-feeling that he is able to effect a reconciliation between his philosophy and

Tarrik's Marobian faith. The friendship of Philylla with Berris and Erif disturbs the Spartan pattern because it introduces this note of unstructured personal kindliness which is, in Mitchison's outlook, an integral part of the pattern which makes for happiness.

These remarks are deliberately general because the connections which they identify are only one aspect of this very rich novel. The cultures as represented in The Corn King are united theoretically in a more organic way than is suggested by the range of moral options with contemporary relevance sketched above, and to understand this further source of unity we must turn to the cultural typology of Gerald Heard. Naomi Mitchison first came to know Gerald Heard in the mid-nineteen twenties and during the next few years they struck up a close personal and intellectual friendship. At that time Heard was unknown but with the publication of his The Ascent of Humanity (1929) he began a career as an intellectual synthesiser and secular theologian. In Mitchison's words,

About the middle of the long weekend when we had recovered from World War I but were not ready to face World War II, it seemed as though Gerald Heard was saying something - writing something - which was at the back of all our minds, of extreme importance but so far unexpressed. In fact he was our prophet. 1

Heard read widely in many disciplines in order to analyse and interpret contemporary civilisation and he is therefore an ideal thermometer for testing the intellectual ambience in which The Corn King was written. More specifically Naomi Mitchison must have been familiar with the

1. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.107.

ideas expressed in 'The Ascent of Humanity' (1929) and 'The Emergence of Man' (1931) - essentially a more literary re-write of the first book - some time before they were published; indeed she probably contributed to their germination. Heard too must have been familiar with 'The Corn King' before it was published. The following account of Heard's ideas and their relationship to the novel is designed to establish not the dependence of one book on the other, but their striking similarities.

The key concept in 'The Ascent of Humanity' is Heard's view of social evolution as the external manifestation of psychic change, namely, the emergence of human self-awareness and finally individuality from a primal collective consciousness.¹ In Heard's own words,

the emergence of individual self-consciousness
is the cause of history.

The graph of this development however is no single straight line rising from right to left but rather a series of cycles or spirals,² each of which represents the growth of a culture from the original collective state through a phase of increasing self-consciousness until an excess of individuality destroys it.

in general terms we can say that all evolution

1. In terms of the history of ideas, this is Darwin and Bergson put to the service of Hegelian idealism.
2. The cyclic metaphor is drawn from Oswald Spengler 'Der Untergang des Abendlandes' (1918), translated as 'The Decline of the West', translated C.F. Atkinson (London, 1926). Heard wishes to establish the psychic as opposed to Spengler's biological basis for the metaphor, but for Mitchison the two go together. Spirals or gyres are the leading metaphor in W.B. Yeats's 'A Vision' (London, 1926).

is from the complex to the expressed, from the diffuse to the intense and back again to the resolved. Life is a constant process of focus and expansion. 1

Along with this recurring pattern of growth and decay there is an overall upward tendency, the graph being

as the path traced by a force constantly striving more freely to express itself, and through its means feeling towards and discovering its ends. 2

Two ideas in this general outline are of particular relevance to an understanding of The Corn King and the Spring Queen. The first is that the evolutionary process as manifested in the large scale is repeated in the smaller scale. Thus the pattern of the whole course of history until the present day is repeated in that of a particular period, a single culture or indeed, and this is the source of the organic metaphor, in the lifespan of an individual. This principal offers one means of understanding why what happens to Erif, to Marob, to Sparta and to Alexandria is so closely interrelated on the psychological level: they are all at different stages and degrees of the one process.

The second interesting component of Heard's ideas is that he preserves the idea of progress. In the wake of World War One, nineteenth-century liberal optimism was under attack on many fronts, not least the historical and anthropological, with Spengler's thesis of the

1. Gerald Heard The Ascent of Humanity (London, 1929) p.260.

2. Ibid., p.22.

West's decline and the influential Diffusionist view of history as a steady decline from the Golden Age of pastoral man. By introducing the spiral metaphor and by refining progress to a psychological concept, Heard attempts to maintain the cause of rational, scientific optimism. Moreover, he does not see the current individualistic condition as the highpoint of the evolutionary process but as the jumping-off point for a new "super-individuality", which will possess both the binding virtues of the old collective psychology and the rational impersonality of science. Although Naomi Mitchison was not fully convinced by this last idea she is, in The Corn King¹ and elsewhere, concerned to trace a process of individual growth and simultaneously to retain the wholeness of the collective sense. There is an abiding tension in her work between her faith in rationality and her artistic humanism.

Turning to Heard's stages of individual emergence, there are further interesting analogies. The first agents of the evolution of consciousness are what he describes as "proto-individuals".¹ They are normally the priest-kings or witches on whom the primitive group focusses its sense of cohesion and ancestral continuity. In accordance with the received notions of the Cambridge School, Heard holds the mother figure to have been the original group leader with the male figurehead as a subsequent development, but both perform a similar function.

1. The term "proto-individuals" is derived from Spengler's German "Ur-" terms. The stages of Heard's schematisation are not entirely dissimilar to Giambattista Vico's division of history into three ages, the divine, the heroic and the human.

The first ruler is therefore a being whose attributes are such that they all become, with the growing definition of an intensifying consciousness magical. This being is no tyrant or one with whom men made contracts, or even a hero who promises them deliverance and dominance. She or he is a sacramental creature, a mystic concentration of the tribe's actuality and a mystic link with the potentiality of the other life. 1

These figures are cramped by taboo and so subject to their communal role that the termination of that role may coincide with their sacrificial death. As Frazer had brilliantly analysed, this custom of killing the King was subject to first the substitution of an alternative victim and then figurative representation or mumming.² The Queen figures seem guaranteed greater continuity through being sexually part of the creative background of nature as well as of the life of man. For Heard the ritual killing of the King marks an important stage in the development of the community and this passage from The Emergence of Man could have been written about The Corn King.

.... we can then watch civilisation going through a critical but inevitable phase, illustrative and projective, as are all such crises, of a crisis in the spirit of man. For this Ritual Killing of the king, though it does not last long, marks a very important phase in the growth of man's mind and its social consciousness. Before that phase he has always been directly conscious of the tribe as a whole and therefore of its eternal life and of his generation's identity with it. He therefore does not need to focus his sense of the group on a person. Loyalty is as impossible a notion for him as for us is altruism towards our body. So there is no need for one person to act as go-between and conductor between extant individuals and the

1. Gerald Heard The Ascent of Humanity (London, 1929) p.69.

2. J.G.Frazer The Golden Bough Chapters XXIV and XXV.

reservoir of potential racial life Every one is the tribe and the tribe is eternal. It is in the transitional period between this time of direct and dominant group sense, and the time when the individual will have established himself as the End of the community (instead of the community being the End of the individual) that we get the Ritual Killings of the king. The gradual transformation of these from murders to mummings is an exact indication of the gradual emergence of the individual's sense of his sole importance. 1

The emergence of self-consciousness is a painful process for these proto-individuals, as indeed it is for Tarrik and Erif, since, detached from their ritual identity, they lose not only their social role but the construction of reality by which it is sustained.

Driven from the circle of life wherein no sensation reached him save filtered and refined so as to produce its appropriate and satisfying reaction, he would, should this process have taken place at a blow, have found himself with an experience irrelevant, interminable, paralysing. 2

Such a crisis, though developed and expanded on the personal level, is what sends Tarrik and Erif to Greece and what governs their subsequent quest for integration and happiness. As analysed in the previous chapter, it is Tarrik whose crisis corresponds more closely to Heard's model. In Erif's case the theme of emergent self-awareness is interpreted in terms of a Freudian conflict with her father, of a troubled marriage, and of a transition from girl to woman and mother, which coincides with the death of Erif's own mother and the consequent severance of continuity between the generations. Yet all these

1. Gerald Heard The Emergence of Man (London, 1931) p.99.

2. Gerald Heard The Ascent of Humanity (London, 1929) p.76.

factors relate to the nexus of problems surrounding individual death and the possibility of continued existence through the group, with which Heard concerns himself.

Before leaving this discussion of Marob as a society in which a few proto-individuals are emerging from the chrysalis of their social role, it is important to note that Naomi Mitchison adds an artist figure to that of the priest-king and the witch. Berris too is a proto-individual although his developing awareness is centred around the discovery of new artistic techniques and achievements. Heard comments that art is responsive to psychic change but he does not match the consistency with which Mitchison relates artistic styles to types of society and the psychological character they embody. Berris is also a focus for artistic self-consciousness within the novel, and as such an indicator of the function art can perform in human life, particularly in the interchange between the emergent self and the unconscious.

The second stage in Gerald Heard's schematisation of matching psychological and cultural types is heroic. Hemmed in by his role, the priest-king takes the initiative, challenging his tribe and asserting his own personal leadership through some major endeavour. Such heroic leadership is often associated in Heard's view with a revolution for the inauguration of the heroic phase marks a sharp and rapid change in consciousness among a significant section of the population. At such a juncture the priest-king becomes more distinctively a military and political leader, thus leaving scope for a separate priesthood and organised religion.

There are points of similarity between this category of development and the new hold which Tarrik gains over his people after his defence of the sacred objects, his imprisonment at the hands of the Red Riders and his subsequent escape. There is also a religious element in that change as Tarrik is thought to have returned from the dead and is regarded, temporarily at least, more in the light of a god than of one possessing, by tribal custom, a periodic godhead. However the analogy is not exact since there is only a hint of religious development and no revolution. Indeed the precise nature of the changes in Marob remains vague and a source of dissatisfaction in the last chapters of the book.

It is in Sparta that the heroic phase gains its fullest expression though in an atypical form, since Sparta has already in Heard's scheme passed through an age of law-givers into an age of individualism. Thus the revolutions of Agis and Kleomenes are affected by the concepts of law and just rule evolved in the Greek classical period, and Kleomenes has to fight against the luxurious and self-seeking society which has established itself since the heyday of Athens and Lycurgan Sparta. Nevertheless the revolution is inspired by the kind of communal feeling centred on a great leader which characterises Heard's heroic phase, and it brings a wider range of people to self-realisation than had been true of the previous social order; the circle of self-consciousness is extended.

In the culmination of 'The Corn King' Mitchison merges the heroic and the proto-individual phases. There is a struggle in Kleomenes between heroic greatness of spirit and self-centred power-

seeking, but in the end he dies in the manner of his Spartan ancestors and perpetuates the restored sense of common purpose and fulfillment to which his revolution has given birth. As the priest-king dies to maintain and strengthen the common life of his tribe so the hero dies to preserve a rather different but nonetheless real communal spirit; the act of sacrifice is common to both.

An age of law-givers, political and natural, is, according to Heard, a rare occurrence in history: normally the hero turns tyrant and then oligarchy and individualism flourish along with the increasing power of money. This is true of Aratos and his Achaean League, but for Naomi Mitchison the appeal of the Greek genius is its concern with the rational ordering of the cosmos and with the concept of a just society. These Greek ideals are present in the novel in their Hellenistic guise, the Stoic philosophy, and to a lesser extent the Epicurean which has, in Mitchison's treatment, been influenced by the cults of brotherhood and mercy. The advantages and limitations of Greek rationality are measured through them.

Heard's final phase is the individualistic one in which the ruler turns introspective and religious energy is diverted from the social stream into cults of personal salvation. Eventually this trend leads to social collapse. In Alexandria Mitchison depicts an extreme form of such a society in which the monarch's mysticism verges on solipsism and megalomania. A further interest of Egypt is that as an ancient and advanced culture it displays examples of every stage in Heard's evolutionary cycle.

The New Empire in Egypt takes us actually through this cycle: from a revival of the Heroic phase, past the indulgent and the mystic phase, to a collapse of society. Egypt continues to work out the theme of individuality's emergence, but each time the fissiparity is more complete until native society can no longer be made to cohere. Then the rise of 'salvationism', long arrested by organised religion and hierarchy, marks the desertion by all the higher types, of the community, which is left to fools or knaves So in Egypt we have the type of all social evolution. 1

Mitchison utilises this variety, at a later period of Egypt's history, in order to telescope Erif's cultural experience in the one place. The Egypt of Ptolemey and Sosibios is also one "left to fools or knaves".

The direction of Heard's schematisation is towards his analysis of the contemporary scene. He delineates the present as an age of individualism and a revolutionary one in which a rapidly increasing number of people are achieving conscious selfhood, over a decreasing period of time. However this need not necessarily lead to social collapse for the cyclical but nonetheless progressive course of evolution had, in his view, reached the point where the birth of a new kind of consciousness might take humanity beyond individualism into a higher sense of the communal. Thus civilisation was at a crisis point comparable in many ways to the original emergence of consciousness. Like that crisis the effect on those pioneers at the centre of the new movement is painful - Heard speaks of "arrest" and "isolation".

1. Gerald Heard, The Ascent of Humanity (London, 1929) p.68.

If, however, our present intensity and isolation of consciousness can be shown to be a very late and passing consequence of man's psychological evolution at its acutest; a swift transition between the complete insensitiveness of the absolute individual and the new collective being; a growing pain or birth pang of the larger consciousness; then we may be able to recognise that co-conscious lives,¹ though they made possible our stage of evolved consciousness, and are by so much means, being co-conscious, were also ends in themselves, for co-consciousness has its own eternity. 2

In Heard's typology, the modern age combines features of the emergent, the heroic-revolutionary and the individualistic phases or, in another context, aspects of Marob, Sparta and Alexandria.

Whether Naomi Mitchison fully accepted Heard's idea of a "super-individuality" or not, she certainly shared the prevailing sense that European civilisation was in crisis, brought on by the decline of liberal individualism, and that a body of pioneer spirits or intellectuals were playing a significant role in the situation by seeking fresh values, uncontaminated by their social inheritance of class loyalty and patriotism. In a letter to her aunt, Elizabeth Haldane, written in nineteen twenty-eight, Naomi Mitchison makes a moving statement of this belief, tying it closely to historical events.

"You know, Aunt Bay, I don't believe you realise how much the war has upset our generation - mine and the one immediately after it The first wave of disturbance was the one at the time, and now we're in for the second, after the period of calm and exhaustion immediately following the thing. I think this is what happened after the Peloponnesian and after the Napoleonic wars.

1. "Co-conscious" is Heard's term for the collective consciousness.

2. Gerald Heard The Ascent of Humanity (London, 1929) p.11.

Ours was worse than either. You still have a balance for your life: all that incredible pre-war period when things seemed in the main settled, just moving solidly and calmly like a glacier towards all sorts of progress. But we have had the bottom of things knocked out completely, we have been sent reeling into chaos and it seems to us that none of your standards are either fixed or necessarily good because in the end they resulted in this smash-up. We have to try and make a world for ourselves, basing it as far as possible on love and awareness, mental and bodily, because it seems to us that all the repressions and formulae, all the cutting off of part of experience, which perhaps looked sensible and even right in those calm years, have not worked. Much has been taken from us but we will stick like fury to what is left, and lay hold on life as it comes to us. 1

Increasingly as the thirties progressed Mitchison turned from the intellectual and spiritual experimentation of Heard's circle towards socialism as a means of resolving this crisis.²

A sense of crisis is the central though indirect analogy between the past as portrayed in 'The Corn King' and the present of the nineteen twenties. The quest of Tarrik and Erif for values and a life-pattern is provoked by the disruption of a previously settled state, socially and personally, in which these things did not have to be consciously sought but were handed on and accepted as a matter of course. Their search brings them into contact with a range of possible society types and ways of thought each of which has a link with the present. These comparisons are not tidy but that does not affect the suggestive

1. Unpublished letter from Naomi Mitchison to Elizabeth Haldane, August 1928.

2. This trend is discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

and emotive power of the quest theme, and of the social conflict and personal happiness from which it arises.

Structurally a crisis and quest is the backbone of The Corn King whose success as a literary work depends on the extent to which the historical and philosophical themes are integrated with the fates of Erif and Tarrik. The historical setting of the novel is important since it provides a contextual unity and qualifies the anthropological and psychological schematisation, while simultaneously tolerating a greater degree of cultural generalisation than might be acceptable in a contemporary, socially realistic novel. But the overall dynamic of events is a personal, moral and existential search for values, not the forces of history. The structure of cultural and anthropological ideas broadens the significance of the quest by constructing a web of reference around the central symbolic figures of King and Queen, embracing the historical period in which the book is set and that in which it was written, but the cohesion of the web hangs on the symbolic and realistic force of the quest itself.

The Romance structure of The Corn King is not however wholly unrelated to the anthropological ideas which it unifies; on one reading it is their organic culmination since it too derived, in contemporary thinking, from the natural cycle of growth and decay. In nineteen twenty the Arthurian scholar, Jessie Weston, advanced a persuasive thesis linking the Arthurian quests with the mystery cult of Mithras and thus with Frazer's Vegetation Spirit. As Naomi Mitchison was already writing in nineteen twenty-four about

Mithraism,¹ and as the Arthurian legends have been one of her lifelong interests,² it seems probable that she read Ritual and Romance (1920) in the nineteen twenties. Alternatively, given the common influence of Frazer and the Cambridge School, Mitchison may have arrived intuitively at the same conclusions about the Quest motif as Weston: there are no specific derivations from Ritual and Romance in The Corn King but a similarity of general interpretation.

Weston's method was to establish the general shape of the Arthurian quest from different versions, to trace the main motifs back to ancient fertility ritual, and then to return to their literary form by way of the mystery cults. First of all there is the sickness of the Fisher King and the associated wasting of the land; the King is identified as a Vegetation Spirit whose loss of virility has led to a failure of the earth's generative powers. In The Corn King Marob's seasons depend on the vigour of their King and Queen, and when they fall psychologically sick, the rituals are upset and the prosperity of the land threatened. That is why Tarrik and Erif go to Greece, why Erif has to set out on her quest and why, in Marob's view at least, the crops fail during Tarrik's year away. In addition Erif's crisis is deepened by the death of her first baby which constitutes an interruption of her fruitfulness and that of Marob, since her child is

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1. See "The Triumph of Faith" in the short story When the Bough Breaks (London, 1924). Mithraism also features in Blood of the Martyrs (London, 1939), and in the short story "Mithras, My Saviour" (from The Penguin Book of Scottish Short Stories ed. J.F.Hendry, Penguin Books, 1970) which follows the cult to the North of Britain where Jessie Weston located its contact with the Matter of Britain.
 2. Surprisingly Mitchison has constructed only one adult novel around the Arthurian material, To the Chapel Perilous (London, 1955).

the New Year.

The task of the quester is to ask the right question about the grail and thus to cure the king, "free the waters" and restore fertility to the land. In Mitchison's case the questers are the king and queen figures themselves but in many versions of the Grail legend the quester can put both himself and the land at risk according to how he behaves in Grail Castle. According to Weston, these perils were originally part of the secrets of the grail and a necessary preliminary to their spiritual benefit. The greatest danger which the quester faces is at the Chapel Perilous where many knights die after the appearance of the Black Hand. This Weston interprets as a foretaste of the physical horrors of death through which the knight must go before he can experience the deepest mysteries of life as symbolised by the lance and the grail. As such the Chapel Perilous is a literary analogue of initiation into the Greater Mysteries of Mithras and their spiritual secrets, as opposed to the Lesser Mysteries which are concerned only with natural fertility.

The idea of initiation as a death and rebirth is derived by Weston from Van Gennep's widely influential book Rites of Passage,¹ and is also present in The Corn King. Erif's quest, her meeting with her mother and her guarding of Kleomenes' body are all part of her passage from maiden to mother which had been so severely disrupted in Marob.

1. Arnold van Gennep Les Rites de Passage (1909) translated as Rites of Passage, M.B.Vizedon and A.L.Caffee (London, 1960).

The trance into which she goes and her metamorphosis into the form of a serpent are her descent into death from which she emerges restored and renewed. Further because her initiation has not been a simple natural process but has involved suffering and danger, she is a psychologically stronger person, a higher type, in Heard's terms, than she would otherwise have been. She has passed successfully through the Chapel Perilous.

Likewise Tarrik's perilous adventures among the Red Riders when he is nearly eaten (an anticipation of the fate for which he is in the natural course of things destined) can be seen as his initiation into manhood and kingship from which he emerges psychologically renovated and able to restore Marob to its full vigour. For both Tarrik and Erif their initiation into adult maturity and leadership is a process of death and rebirth, and the fulfillment of their quest which began in a breakdown of the fertility cycle and brought them through danger to a personal realisation of the mystery doctrine and the restoration of Marob. To Marob Tarrik is as a god returned from the dead; in Egypt Ptolemy greets the appearance of the serpent as a manifestation of the mystery god, Dionysius-Serapis.¹

However Mitchison's preference for the Romance quest structure is already well established in her early historical fiction and any Weston style theorising must be accounted accessory after the fact.

1. For Dionysius' connection with the Omphalos at Delphi and the Xthonic powers associated with the snake, see J.E. Harrison Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion (Cambridge, 1903) pp. 557-8.

The Romance is Mitchison's natural genre and in The Corn King she is not only sensitive to its wider implications but adept at presenting it in a credible, contemporary prose form and a craftsmanlike literary artefact. Apart from the idea of purification which is mainly contextual, two motifs are used throughout the novel to symbolise the quest theme. One is the "kataleptike phantasia", a Stoic and therefore Greek idea, used to express that which is ultimately real.

It is certain that the mirror image is less true than the thing itself, that the straightness of the rod is more proper to it than the crookedness we see in it when we look at it through water; so there must be degrees of unreality, until at last one comes down to certain appearances which are so undistorted that one may take them to be sure. It is these that seize upon the mind, and are in turn seized upon and turned into security: the Kataleptike Phantasia. They build the wall against unreality and the fearful place where a man may lose himself.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.103)

The image recurs throughout the novel to express whatever a character discovers to be most existentially real and true for them. So when Therykion urges Kleomenes to die, he speaks of his "kataleptike phantasia" as "a kind of beauty which is utterly lost in living and being rational and making plans and having material hopes". This beauty he thinks will be achieved by Kleomenes' death and it will "put a bloom" on his people. In fact Kleomenes' death is presented as fruitful in a way in which his life has not been: it achieves the kind of reality which can fulfill quests.

Similarly when Erif hears by letter that Tarrik has rediscovered himself, she declares,

'Now Tarrik is made lucky, he will be able sooner or later to pull me home and make me safe and happy again. Oh, Berris, my marriage is not for nothing now! In spite of all the things which have happened and which will happen yet, in spite of pain and danger and separation, my marriage is real, and I shall see my husband and everything will come right in the end! '

'That is all true', said Berris smiling. 'Your marriage is a kataleptike phantasia, Erif, wife of Tarrik.'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.533)

This suggestion that a true union of the male and the female is a fulfillment of the quest adumbrates the union of Erif and Kleomenes in death, which enables her to rejoin Tarrik.

The other main quest motif is Marob's secret road. This road is the dream and lifework of Erif's brother Yellow Bull, who is pure barbarian. His road offers an escape route into the remote marshes which will take Marob away from the pressures of civilisation and development. As opposed to the outward looking Greek kataleptike, it is an inward symbol, a path into the unconscious. In this instance Mitchison is her own best interpreter and it is necessary to quote at length.

* 'It's like the marshes, Erif, all low and twisty, so that one can never see clear through it. I want a road.'

'A Secret road.'

'To get myself and Marob across. I would be very glad to do that before I died. I want to find where we are in the universe. If it is like the philosophers tell us, earth and air and fire and water, all remote and unfriendly, and currents in it moving one whether one chooses or not! I want to find it kinder.'

'And I want to find it in my power! ' said Erif, suddenly and comfortingly aware of herself as a witch, 'and I will! We'll save the people, Tarrik.'

He said, hesitating, unlike himself: 'I think that even if they want something more than the seasons, the Corn King might be the Risen Corn for them, for their hearts as well as for their fields. But he might have to die first.'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.321)

Tarrik's last remark points to his own "return from death" and links the idea of the secret road with the "kataleptike phantasia" of Kleomenes' death. Erif also finds a secret road to fulfill her quest.

She took off her sandals and began to walk out towards them. She remembered there were leeches in Lake Mareotis, but she did not mind. For a long way out it was little more than ankle deep, and there were patches of slimy weed It was cool underfoot. It reminded her suddenly of the salt marshes of the secret road; it reminded her of Murr

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.680)

The road takes Erif to a meeting with her mother which in turn prepares her for her role as the life-giver and comforter of Kleomenes, the part which she had refused, in her unhappiness, to play for the luckless Murr.

From the end of Part IV the movement of the novel is towards resolution, Marob and home, as opposed to the earlier outward direction of the quest. From Sparta Tarrik gains little; when he hears the news of Erif's supposed death he takes refuge on the same mountainside on which Agis had received his vision of the New Times, but, instead of a vision of Greek justice and reform, the King of Marob has a revelation of the continued life of his Queen.¹ The stoicism of Sparta cannot offer the kind of conscious philosophy which the life-

1. The Corn King and the Spring Queen pp.178-9.

loving Marobians require, and the homeward movement of their quest is significantly paralleled by the historical decline of Sparta's fortunes. It is only in defeat and death that Sparta contributes symbolically to the life of Marob.

The resolution of the quest begins after the death of Agiatis and the reversal of Kleomenes' Corinthian triumph, when Erif and Berris go to Delphi. This is appropriate since Delphi is a shrine of both the xthonic and the Apolline forces. The sanctuary is shared on a half-yearly basis between Dionysius and Apollo and is held in Themis¹ to have been originally devoted to the worship of the Eniautos-Daimon, later associated with Dionysius. In ancient belief the Omphalos or navel stone at Delphi was the centre of the earth and, according to Harrison, the grave of the snake-daimon, the principal embodiment of the Xthonic powers. At Delphi Erif receives both rational counsel in the shape of the Epicurean philosopher, Hyperides, and oracular guidance from the daimonically possessed Delphic priestess.²

Encouraged by Hyperides' unstoic love of life, Erif and Berris send him to Tarrik in the hope that his philosophy might ease the

1. See J.E.Harrison Themis (Cambridge, 1912) Chapter XI.

2. The full oracle reads as follows.

"The Mother must meet the Daughter, the Dead must meet with
the Snake.

A House shall stand in the Cornfield, though it cost five
years to make.

Potters will paint their Vases, Poets will string their Rhymes,
and Kings will die for the People in many places and times."

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.417)

crisis into which Sphaeros' stern emphasis on duty and virtue had thrown him. Flung together as captives, Hyperides and Tarrik move from an initial position of distrust to one of mutual confidence. Hyperides offers Tarrik an analysis of his unhappiness which voices from within the novel Gerald Heard's view of history and of the "proto-individual's" plight.

It is natural for men to live in communities and painful to them when these communities break up. The closer the community is, the better for the general happiness, for there they have a unity ready provided for them, easy to accept, hard not to accept. They need never question: they need only live. And death is not a severance from the community, but merely another facet of it.

Yet, as men's minds grow, they have to question. And as they question and become different from one another and want to be still more different and to lead each his own separate life, so the community breaks up. The people in it are no longer part of a unity and harmony that includes their friends and their dead and their unborn - a unity in time - and no longer part of the earth and the crops and the festivals of the community - a unity in space. They question the gods, and the gods crumble and fade and are no more help.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.460)

As possible life-supports in this existential crisis, which is all the more severe in Marob through having been suddenly and precipitately provoked by Sphaeros' stoicism, Hyperides offers Tarrik the classic humanist virtues - a rational acceptance of death, an emphasis on knowledge and a refined ideal of community as friendship.

Now in general this comes gradually, and from generation to generation men have time to grow up until they are old enough and brave enough to wed with the naked truth and perhaps beget wonderful children on her. They can save themselves from the chaos and fear of being cityless and godless. The foolish ones invent for themselves new gods, each a god and saviour for himself. But the wise ones recognise this as folly, and the only comfort and substitute

they make for themselves is the love and trust of their friends and the excitement of the hunt after knowledge.

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' p.460)

In addition Hyperides gives Tarrik his own friendship and his aid through conversation in disburdening the Marobian of his fears, confusions and overemphases. Through this friendship Hyperides too is changed and comes to see how apparent "irrationality" can function appropriately and intelligibly in the context of Marob. Thus his psychological awareness is deepened and he is able to take an undoctrinaire attitude towards Erif's search for purification at which he had scoffed in Delphi, seeing that something beyond humanistic rationality may be required.

We have talked about her a great deal and about how she is to be saved. It seems to us that only some very beautiful and terrible event will shake her out of the solitude where she is back into the life of Marob, and into Tarrik's life if he has it still. We do not think that she can save herself entirely by any intellectual process. Women can very rarely do that. I do not say that one kind of mind is better than another but I do know that men and women are different.

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' p.461)

If Hyperides modifies his Greek rationalism to incorporate a fuller psychological realism, there is also an unbending of Marob's magic towards a naturalistic interpretation. Tarrik restores his position in the Marob community and festival cycle by a ruse in which he appears suddenly as the Risen Corn. Although psychologically he may be said to have undergone a process of rebirth, an initiation into maturity, there is no question of any magical credence on his part.

In fact the notion of rebirth is underplayed in favour of a general impression of Tarrik's heroic leadership, restored confidence and therefore, in the Marob sense, "luck". Consequently there is a loss of power from the earlier parts of the novel where magic seemed an indispensable focus of Marob's life, and it is hard to credit that Tarrik's dramatic re-emergence is "the beginning of a new religion" (The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.471). The Marob festivals are effective because Mitchison's descriptive prose recreates them, tangibly and emotionally, to convey the inner force of the magical idea. At this juncture, she fails to place the corresponding religious developments in a convincing setting: they are related at second hand in Hyperides' letters. Although Tarrik's reintegration is comprehensible, Marob seems strangely distanced and bloodless in comparison to the earlier vigorous narratives. Tarrik's readiness to go and fetch Erif home is acceptable but the assertion that Marob too has been "saved" is left in the air.

Erif's reintegration is more subtly prefaced. Attracted in Egypt by the worship of Isis, she participates in the baptismal river festival at Midsummer and also in the Lesser Mysteries of the goddess which are a purification rite, preparatory to the Greater Mysteries. There she encounters her old enemy Yersha and removes the bad magic which she had put on her as a revenge years before. This act of forgiveness is a closing of old wounds caused by the death of her first child, a healing brought about by the gentle Isis who 'herself turned back and healed the dying child of her enemy' (The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.575). The festival of Osiris "who is slain every year and broken into pieces and sown like grain" (The Corn King

p.598) comes and goes as does the Egyptian New Year. Everywhere in Egypt Erif encounters a fascination with death but also intimations of transformation and rebirth. The essence of Egyptian magic is the trancelike harmony of all living things in the metamorphoses of birth, death and rebirth.¹ Midsummer and the Nile floods are drawing near once more, when Kleomenes' luck gives out finally and completely, and the last tragedy is set in motion.

Numbed by shock and grief, Erif undergoes two strange experiences which fulfill the terms of the Delphic oracle. Firstly she meets her mother now transformed, as she had prophesied before her death, into a bird, a flamingo. This encounter repairs the breach in the continuity of the generations which had ensued after her mother's death and helps Erif to make the transition from maiden to mother which that breach retarded. From Nerrish she learns the wisdom of the ancestors, particularly the ability to accommodate suffering and death, without relinquishing what happiness and beauty life can nonetheless supply.

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1. "The Dead were here, even overshadowing the living in interest and importance; that was new after Greece and the insistence on life in flesh and art and poetry, most of all in the bodies and minds of the young. In Egypt the preparations for death began early, with youth itself, for who could escape? For the most part, both Greeks and Egyptians had the same fear and horror of death and lack of any confidence about more than a dim and almost worthless survival, but the Greeks faced violently away, while the Egyptians were all the time being drawn and fascinated towards that ultimate stiffness, that final formalising of the fluent body.

"The Corn King and the Spring Queen" p.563.

For the cycle of birth and death see E.A.T.W.Budge Egyptian Magic (London, 1899), Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection (London, 1920). See also note 1 overleaf.

'She had been frightened of happiness. Instead of taking it and accepting it, she had looked forward timorously to its inevitable ending - as though she could know then how it would end - and used her strength and thought in trying to ward off evil before evil was yet there She had been afraid of the jealousy of unknown powers, and had tried to propitiate them by spoiling her happiness, by cutting off a part of it to sacrifice to them. To-day she was afraid of no power not even death, now she knew what it was.'

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' p.680)

Nerrish's metamorphosis into a flamingo is in keeping with her status as a Marob witch and with Egyptian belief, in which the soul after death can take the form of a "ba", a bird with a human face.¹ Other Egyptian bird symbols include the feathered image of Isis, the Divine Mother, in her temple and the bird of death in Berris' statue of Philylla. Erif's journey out into the mud flats, which are thirsty for the floods or in quest language "the releasing of the waters", is a journey on a secret road into the unconscious, symbolised by water.

Everywhere the lake had shrunk and dried away with summer, leaving a series of crusted curves of mud; beyond, it lay still and patient, waiting for rain. Quantities of birds were feeding out there, a good many ducks and moorfowl and cranes, but mostly the tall rosy birds, the flamingoes of the African marshes, great flocks of them, the colour of the sunrise that had almost faded out of the eastern sky, that was giving place to the thick blue dazzle of day. The rosy birds stood on one leg, jutting their long necks and crooked beaks, fishing the muddy shallows.

('The Corn King and the Spring Queen' pp.680-1)

1. Plutarch De Iside et Osiride ed. J.G.Griffiths (University of Wales Press, 1970) p.545.

There is a suggestiveness and expectancy about the beauty of this description which is on the threshold of some symbolic manifestation, but the subsequent appearance of the talking bird demands too sudden and literal a switch into the realm of the supernatural. It involves a naive acceptance of magic per se which has not been required of the reader heretofore, and smacks more of the Edwardian fairy tale than of myth. In literary terms it is an easy way out, a wholesale abandonment of psychological realism to which Naomi Mitchison was attracted by a streak of whimsy which surfaces to better effect in her childrens' books..

Nerrish tells Erif that she is on the brink of an experience which will be the climax and the catharsis of all her traumas. This experience will be like a death but it will also be a birth, an initiation into a new life stage.

"You have to be broken before you can be put together again. That was what they did to Osiris here, a long time ago. That was what happened to your father when he was made into the corn."

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.681)

Erif's catalepsy is therefore a descent into death and the unconscious, which balances and counteracts her previous return to the primal collective consciousness when she killed her father. Her awaking to find Tarrik and Klint beside her is a recognition or rebirth scene, typical of the Romance conclusion, and a resurrection analogous to the inner regeneration of the Greater Mysteries.

"She laughed louder, as though it were irresistible: as the actor in the Corn Play must laugh when he wakes again after Death and Winter. Then she was still, but her eyelids flickered and came half open and then fully open."

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.692)

The snake is a symbol of Erif's rebirth and of her fulfillment as a witch. By, in Egyptian terms, sending out her khu or spirit into another body she achieves high magic, though not as a display of virtuosity. Through the Greek cult of Asclepois, the serpent is also a symbol of protection and healing, and her metamorphosis enables Erif to play a significant role in the Spartan story. Already she has taken the place of Agiatis as mother and friend to Philylla, but in her transformation she becomes the helper and comforter of Kleomenes. The symbolic union of the snake and the corpse makes Erif the Spartan's spouse and his queen. Thus in this sequence of tragic deaths the Spartan foursome of King and Kouros, Mother and Maiden, is reunited: Philylla is reintegrated into the pattern from which she had strayed in her unhappiness, and Erif fills the gap left by death.

The deaths of the Spartans, summed up as it were in the death of Kleomenes, are not just a personal disaster but the death of the idea of Sparta or of its essential communality.

'You and Berris,' said Philylla, 'you two dear - barbarians. You don't begin to know what's happened. It's not my own single life. It's not - not Panteus It's the life I was part of that is gone. I feel - hollow. My God has left me. There'll be no more Sparta.'

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.664)

But the snake is an embodiment of the dead hero and representative of the ancestors, and because of its coming the heroic agon is not the finish of the Spartan ideal. Kleomenes' death with its attendant circumstances gains a mythic power, generates a legend, and so renews the revolutionary movement. The snake provides the female qualities which the male-orientated Spartiate ethos underplays, and among these

qualities is the ability to create life. Agiatis' children are killed and Philylla dies childless but the Spartan idea begets successors and, through the intervention of the snake, Therykion's prophecy of the bloom that Kleomenes' death will put on his people is fulfilled.

The experiences of Erif's quest, culminating in her metamorphosis, enable her to return to Marob and to play the part for Tarrik and Marob which she has played for Kleomenes and Sparta: The disrupted marriage is restored. In this sense the King of Sparta dies for Marob and Erif's initiation into an adult awareness of suffering and death is accomplished without any harm coming to Tarrik. The new kind of death which entered the seasonal cycle is countered by a new kind of life which goes beyond unquestioning natural fertility. Viewed from this angle, Erif's trance is not unlike the dream oracles or cures bestowed on the worshippers of Asclepios. However there is also a residual sense, corrupted by Ptolemey's lust for blood, that Kleomenes' death, inasmuch as it is a ritual sacrifice, is effectual for Marob regardless of its psychological and moral influence on Erif; this direct use of myth in its ritual or religious context is a source of difficulty in the conclusion of the novel.

The Egyptian context of these events provides further layers of mythical imagery and reference. In Alexandrian hands the death and rebirth of the hero becomes the passion and resurrection of the Dying and Rising God. To mark the appearance of the snake, Ptolemey sends a cup and a growing vine to the stake, thus acknowledging a manifestation of Dionysius-Serapis, the mystery god. Alexandrian syncretism also

connected Dionysius with the native Osiris, originally a Vegetation Spirit, and the flaying and impaling of Kleomenes is comparable to the dismemberment of Osiris by Seth. In this drama Erif takes the part of Isis, the Divine Mother and consort of Osiris, who gathered together the pieces of her lord's body and lovingly restored it, thereby displaying her nature as, in Rostovtsev's phrase "the apotheosis of maternal love and the personification of the mystic feminine principle."¹

There are analogues too in Gerald Heard's thought for the final sequence of The Corn King. In his discussion of proto-individuals he offers a very appropriate model for the resolution of Erif's quest.

Though then the proto-individual goes exploring into exile, with the 'qui vive' which may so soon turn into a mortal challenge, he takes with him, like Aeneas, portable gods. When Eden vanishes every man takes his share of what he contributed to the mirage, for, toward the end, the group consciousness must increasingly be kept going by individual, though still unconscious help. 2

Apart from the fact that Tarrik and Erif literally take with them portable symbols, the star and the knife, of Marob and each other, Erif's Egyptian experiences are just such a discovery of personally meaningful but still unconscious symbolism (the birds and the snake) which allows her to rejoin Marob and to support both its life and that of Tarrik. Erif's individuality is sustained by, in Heard's words, "a memory of identity with the everlasting community". For Heard a

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1. Cambridge Ancient History Vol.VII The Hellenistic Monarchies and the Rise of Rome p.146.
 2. Gerald Heard The Ascent of Humanity (London, 1929) pp.76-7.

rediscovery of the collective sense is also the solution to the crisis of contemporary civilisation, so the resolution phase maintains a point of contact with the modern situation. Mitchison however keeps closely to the historical context and to ancient, historically established symbols. This is indicative, less of her concern with historical accuracy, than of her preference for rooting her psychological understanding in the past. She toyed with Heard's idea of a new science-based super-consciousness but eventually turned her back on it and on Heard's highly intelligent but culturally rootless circle.

Unfortunately the literary execution of the novel's resolution phase does not match up to its conception and cannot satisfactorily sustain the thematic weight placed upon it. This is partly a structural problem in that Marob is reintroduced after too long an interval. It is difficult to believe that Kleomenes' death and Erif's experiences can have any corporate significance for Marob because the reader has lost touch with the society as opposed to its leading members. Hyperides' letters leave a distanced impression of developments there and the Epilogue compounds rather than eases the problems.

By providing a glimpse of Marob two generations on, Mitchison wishes to emphasise the restoration of its life pattern - what Tarrik and Erif achieved for their people. But the realities of Marob as a society under pressure of change, partly Hellenised, threatened by the Red Riders and building a secret retreat, are totally neglected. Apart from the rather stage managed affair of the Peloponnesian slave, Marob in the Epilogue is the thinly disguised ideal world of pastoral

Romance or romantic comedy, complete with youthful lovers and natural abundance. Tarrik, Erif and their experience have disappeared leaving no trace other than the implication that they are the source of this idyll: restoration has succeeded rebirth. By simply removing the former royal couple in this way (presumably Tarrik has been eaten by the next generation), Mitchison underestimates not only the particularity of the Marob which she has created but the psychological reality of the characters whose sufferings and experiences have been brought to a personal fulfillment through the quest structure. They are more important in the literary and human economy of the novel than is Marob without them, but the reader is expected to acquiesce in their absorption into the communal life stream, of which the novel's resolution is emblematic.

Mitchison's uncertainties about the ending of The Corn King are reflected in her own manuscript notes.¹ Originally the epilogue was to be set in Greece, but this plan is emended with the comment, "No! Why not have it at Marob Harbour. Essential to go back to Marob!" Mitchison also remarks, "Must make up my mind what happened to Tarrik." These jottings pinpoint two main critical problems in the ending of the novel: the half-hearted return to Marob, and the fate of Tarrik which is left ambiguous in the text.

It is not totally unexpected that Marob should be dismissed in this way since the climactic event of the novel, Kleomenes' death, is

1. The manuscript of The Corn King is held in an uncatalogued collection in the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

itself a transposition of history into symbol. The whole Spartan enterprise which is based in historical actuality and presented as a realistic narrative, comes to a complete end except for the myth which it generates. This myth is claimed to be directly significant for Marob, and for Sparta in that a legend and a cause are thereby born. The Spartan story, it is implied, is not ultimately tragic since there is for Sparta too a kind of resurrection, embodied in the revolutionary slave who, in the Epilogue, is repaid by the young Corn King's mercy for something of what Sparta has contributed to Marob.

The question for the literary critic is whether the effective power claimed for this myth and its ritual origin is realised within the terms of the novel. Such "mythic" reality presumes an unconscious psychological dimension common to all the characters in the novel, but does it also presume on the reader's ability to participate in this imaginative communion? A whole series of problems about the meaning of myth and the use to which it can be put in literature, particularly in the novel or in this case Romance form, are speedily unearthed.

Naomi Mitchison's use of anthropological ideas, myths and symbols is many-sided and further complicated by the fact that her method is not completely controlled or realised in The Corn King. On one level she uses Frazer and the Cambridge School to construct a society in which ritual and its attendant myths function in a thoroughly pragmatic manner. The myth is supported by a sociological structure of belief which is not irrational but appropriate and effective in its context. Marob bases its life on magic, economically, socially, morally and existentially, and to live in Marob is to believe without

incongruity. These insights, which correspond in anthropological terms to the thought of the founding father of social anthropology, Malinowski,¹ are so concretely realised in Naomi Mitchison's *Marob*, that it is difficult to effectively separate magic from *Marob* later in the novel. In the first phase of *The Corn King*, Mitchison's use of myth is integrated with her historical method.

Marob also fits into the wider scheme of anthropological and philosophical ideas which links up the different cultures. This is a more strained process than the creation of a single society, and at points in the novel the strain shows. Berris has to inform the reader that the snake can be an embodiment of a dead hero, and Ankhet has to explain the Egyptian theory of the parts of the soul.² Erif herself is something of a comparative anthropologist, commenting on and contrasting various customs. However, the quest structure of the novel, as embodied in the principal characters, sustains this bridging enterprise because the different cultural forms are used to express "emotions towards life" relevant to the personal, existential themes. More concretely Erif's is the central consciousness through which the quest is rendered emotionally and psychologically real. An interest in her and her relationship with Tarrik and *Marob*, holds together the three different locations of the novel and allows the more schematic aspects to perform their function unobtrusively. Although the end result is not historical in any generally accepted sense of that term, but a blend of empiricism, rationalism and romance, it is a unified

1. B.G.Malinowski *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (London and New York, 1926).

2. *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* pp.684-5.

world whose particular kind of reality is acceptable because it is integrated within itself, and because it refers to other realities beyond its own boundaries.

But there is also an implicit universalism in 'The Corn King', a more direct claim on the reader, and one which combines two different approaches to symbolism often confused by literary followers of 'The Golden Bough'.¹ On the one hand there is the approach of the comparative anthropologist which identifies in many cultural guises the same underlying patterns; this is Frazer's method in 'The Golden Bough', that of his followers in the Cambridge School and that of Jessie Weston; and Mitchison accepts their analysis of the vegetation cycle as the key to primitive religion, the mystery cults, Greek religion and the quest motif. There is also however a tradition of European Idealist thought, stemming from Herder, Goethe and Schlegel, and associated in the twentieth century with the name of Ernst Cassirer, which holds myth to be a pathway of human understanding, separate from but not inferior to logical processes.² This non-discursive kind of thought, expressed most often in symbols, is valid in its own right and is not reducible to the conceptual mode. In the ending of 'The Corn King' Mitchison uses the bird and the snake, not just as structural devices binding Marob, Egypt and Sparta, but as

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1. For a preliminary survey of this vast subject, see J.B. Vickery The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough (Princeton, 1972). Vickery refers to Naomi Mitchison's 'The Corn King' but treats the relationship between her and Frazer as a simple borrowing of the seasonal idea. His work suffers from an attempt to deal with Frazer and his literary debtors in isolation from the general intellectual climate of the time.
 2. For the influence of this tradition on early twentieth century literature, see The Context of English Literature 1900-1930 edited M. Bell (London, 1980) pp. 166-182.

symbols designed, on their own merit, to express the existential themes of the novel. Likewise the impact of Kleomenes' death depends on the appeal of its mythic form to the reader. Thus the approach of the idealist spills over into that of the comparative anthropologist, and the element of universality is transferred from symbolism as a kind of language to particular symbols or myths as attested in a variety of cultures. If, as seems likely, myths and symbols are not straightforwardly universal but conditioned by their cultural and temporal setting, both intrinsically and with regard to their use, then not only is this combination of idealism and comparative anthropology misguided, but the use of myth in a literary context must alter its nature and purpose far more radically than Mitchison, in the construction of The Corn King¹, seems to suspect.

In literary terms the symbols in the ending of The Corn King fail to communicate because the last phase of the novel seems foreshortened, compressed and structurally flawed. In addition Mitchison's treatment of the idea of the unconscious results in a splitting of her characters between their conscious personalities, which are relatively straightforward, and their passions and instincts which are a principal source of interest. Thus Erif's pivotal experience occurs when she is in a trance and her conscious self is oblivious. This leaves the symbols to speak for themselves without the presence of the person undergoing the experience; there is no attempt at a psychologically convincing portrayal. Alternatively Erif's experience is presented with a crude exterior literalism as in the device of the talking bird. Neither resort is satisfactory because both are insufficiently mediated through the kind of reality,

psychological, social and imaginative, which has been established as acceptable in the heterocosm of the novel.

This direct claim on the reader's ability to make connections also arises from the blurring in Mitchison's method of the boundaries between myth as a ritual or religious vehicle, and the literary deployment of myth. This is partly due to her direct use of anthropological and mythological materials within the text, and partly to a desire which emerges more clearly in Mitchison's later writing to make the novel or the Romance function in a quasi-religious manner. Thus in The Corn King the interaction between the mythic form of Kleomenes' death and the sensibility of the reader, depends ultimately on the contemporary strength of Christian mythology in society at large: the death of the King for his people is an atonement but in Mitchison's presentation, only the believer, the one already in the know, can readily accept it as such.

Fortunately the flaws in the resolution of the novel only partly impair its achievement. This is because there is a fourth use of symbols - a current of psychological interpretation which penetrates beyond the cultural schematisations and which co-exists with Mitchison's character realism and historical empiricism. This interpretative level is concerned with the forms underlying the individual myths, symbols and experiences with which Mitchison deals. The most important of these forms are birth, death and the metamorphoses which lie between the two. These moulds of experience are biological in origin but are used in their psychological format. Transitions from one stage of life to another, from one condition of personality to another, are

considered as a death, a metamorphosis and a rebirth. The death element also requires a giving up of life or sacrifice, a fourth motif which exemplifies a human attitude towards the biological process. The lesson which Erif learns is that something must be given up for something else to be gained: a state of brokenness must be accepted if wholeness is to follow; the Maiden must die if the Mother is to be born. Furthermore the nature of the psychological life is the same as that of the biological; there is no escaping change and process.

The roles of human life are also viewed in the light of a fundamental category, that of the leader or heightened self. The Witch, the Hero and the King are all forms of heightened selves, of those with psychic power and therefore social authority. This power is not located in the conscious personality but must be submitted to as an impersonal force and, although this is less true of women who have a more intimate and aware relationship with the irrational, personalising the impersonal, they too must beware of any attempt to manipulate the unconscious since it may backfire, as it does on Erif.

These forms of heightened selfhood are grouped around two other psychological principles, the Male and the Female, which are also biological in origin. The King and the Hero are particular embodiments of the male self, the Queen, the Witch and the Mother of the female, with the Kouros and the Maiden as the youthful counterparts of each sex. Throughout the novel there is a search for a balance of the Male and Female qualities - of Tarrik and Erif, the rational and the irrational - in a partnership where the main emphasis is placed on the female side. (Tarrik's renewal is important because it gives him the

confidence to go and seek out Erif). Their marriage is a quest for the mature union of the male and female aspects of life which enables each to play its part - the King to serve and strengthen society and the Queen to heal, enrich and generate new life. Such a union is truly a "kataleptike phantasia" or "wall against unreality" and a "secret road" or path into the riches of the psyche. Kleomenes and the snake are designed to symbolise this union but the symbol is an insufficient vehicle for such a tenet or indeed for the breadth and depth of sexual experience charted in the novel.

These categories and the model of the psyche on which they are based, are very close, in a literary format, to the archetype theory of C.G.Jung which constituted his major break with Freudian psycho-analysis.¹ Yet although Mitchison was aware of currents in contemporary thought on which Jung drew, she had not at this time read Jung herself. The position sketched above is her own, arrived at through a combination of her scientific and specifically biological background, and her preference for a few wide-ranging and existentially central symbols. The ending of The Corn King lacks the balance between underlying form and cultural context which Jung's analyses display, and the maturity of Jung's union between rational theorising and

1. Jung's Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido (1912) was translated as Psychology of the Unconscious (translated B.M.Hinkle, London, 1916). His next major volume appeared in English as Psychological Types (translated H.G.Baynes, London, 1923). However the influence of Jung was slower to manifest itself on the literary and intellectual scene than that of Freud, perhaps because he was initially regarded only as one of the Freudian School. There is no mention of Jung, for example, in Heard's early books.

imaginative sympathy. The great psychoanalyst must be recognised at this juncture as a figure in the background, but the direct fertilisation of Mitchison's thought from Jung belongs to a later period.

Despite its monumental qualities 'The Corn King' is a working paper, a statement in the process of construction. Mitchison is feeling her way towards the Jungian interpretation of myth as a reflection of the structure of a biologically grounded psyche, but she is still tied to the comparative anthropology of Frazer and his followers. The novel works towards a mediation between the rational and the irrational, the conscious and the unconscious but, failing to achieve this, retains an uneasy split between the two sides of the psyche - an unsatisfactory choice of Tarrik's philosophy or Erif's symbols.

The conditional nature of Mitchison's achievement is reflected within the novel itself by the career of Berris the artist which might be said to fulfill the terms of the Delphic oracle not already covered by Kleomenes' death and Erif's meetings - "Potters will paint their Vases, Poets will string their Rhymes." The artist as a type possesses his own kind of reality or "kataleptike phantasia", and an immortality apart from the community through his work. However this devotion to an abstract or figurative world excludes the artist from the circle of life.

He remembered once in Athens seeing an old red-figured cup in somebody's house. He had not regarded it much at the time, but now he recollected that it was painted with a Komos scene, gay and frank young men and women with torches and branches and flutes, half or thoroughly naked, following and dancing and

making love round and round the cup; but under each handle, sitting with his hands clasped over his knees, there was a little man who was watching it all quite calmly, and who would have watched in just the same way if the cup had been painted with battle or murder or witchcraft, not moved or shocked or excited, just pleasantly influenced.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.630)

The Komos is a band of fertility dancers like the Kouretes of Themis, and also the basis of comic drama. The little man is the true Greek and the Artist, who is outside the stream of pleasure and vulgarity in which man and nature are caught up.

Paradoxically, though, the detached activity of the artist can nourish the collective life from which he has been separated. Thus Berris' paintings foster the Spartan legend, and his statue of Philylla, held first by love and then by death, is a figure for the artist's attempt to capture, in man-made form, the intensity of myth. The statue of love remains unfinished.

... Philylla's arm and the Thing at her back, which was yet inchoate, only vaguely shaped into a great bird's head, and on one side the elk horns drawn on the surface with charcoal. He was puzzled as to how to make Love tender and gay while yet keeping the severe and unbroken lines. Philylla herself - the flesh Philylla, not the stone one - was a little frightened of this Love; she wanted him to give it a human head and attributes, garlands and doves and what-not.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.630)

It is left an open question as to whether this statue would ever have been finished, had it not been overtaken by events.

The statue of Death and Philylla is finished and does attain to symbolic power but its impact is derived from personal anguish, not the

impersonality of myth or the impartiality of art.

The thing behind had taken shape at last and it had the flat brainless head of a bird and eyes staring to its sides and its beak was open to tear Philylla, and its wings were closing on her greedily. It had no elk horns; there was nothing northern left in it. It was the desolation of the south, the vulture of the sand, Love changed into Death.

(The Corn King and the Spring Queen p.676)

To Berris, who has lost out where happiness and love are concerned, the statue is a slap in the face for "the kind and hopeful people who thought everything must come right in the end". Through the contrast between the two statues Mitchison conveys her conception of the art of her time. Tragedy is supported by all the resources of realism and its symbolism is well developed, but there is a measure of perversity as well as of objectivity in an insistence on pessimism and death. On the other hand the comic movement of love and resurrection evades art, and the conventional symbols of "garlands and doves and what-not" are stale and trite. In this way the artist's condition encapsulates for Mitchison the contemporary crisis of European urban civilisation which, cut off from the natural world and from the memory of everlasting community, is introspective, isolated and arrested.

Thus Mitchison acknowledges that the comic or life-restoring movement of The Corn King does not attain to artistic completeness: its psychological penetration is inadequate and its symbolic form underdeveloped. Rather the resolution is partial favouring the kind and the well-meaning. Yet there is, in Mitchison's view, no objective reason why art, and the novel form, cannot accommodate the myth that goes beyond tragic realism; and discover the appropriate symbols and

the appropriate psychological register for love, reconciliation, reunion and rebirth. This is Naomi Mitchison's challenge to contemporary art and the programme which she sets for herself.

CHAPTER THREE
THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Although a sense of moral and spiritual crisis percolates through Naomi Mitchison's historical fiction in the nineteen twenties, particularly in "The Corn King and the Spring Queen" (1931), the next decade ushered in a disastrous period of economic and social slump. It is therefore unsurprising that the pressure of contemporary circumstances should manifest itself that more directly in the fiction of this period; Samuel Hynes' authoritative study of the decade in literature rests its approach on this premise.

I assume that a close relation exists between literature and history, and I think that this relation is particularly close in times of crisis when public and private lives, the world of action and the world of imagination interpenetrate. 1

European history in this decade is a series of body-blows to peace and stability, beginning with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1931 and culminating in the general war of 1939. In Britain 1931 saw the massive election victory of the National Government and the commencement of a severe policy of fiscal restraint. The Labour Party was confined to the political wilderness and for the first time Marxism seemed to offer a practical course of action to the left, not least the intelligentsia. In 1931 Mitchison began her "historical novel about my own times", We Have Been Warned, which was completed in 1933 as Hitler's Chancellorship began, and, while the decade drew

1. Samuel Hynes The Auden Generation (London, 1976) p.9.

to a close and the threat of war became a reality, she produced Blood of the Martyrs (1939), a parable for the times and her own moral and political testament.

Many of the themes now typified as "thirties" concerns were already Mitchison's own in the preceding decade. In her stress on the role of the irrational in corporate life, and on the need for leaders or heroes (kings and queens in the historical fiction), she belongs to the previous decade which survived the war and was so profoundly influenced by D.H. Lawrence. The tension between private and public experience which was to cause the young writers of the thirties much heart-searching, is also explored in The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931). Many of the anthropologically orientated matrices for the interpretation of experience, established in this earlier novel, shape Mitchison's perception of the new social situation.

At the same time, she is among the first to identify, absorb and express the new issues. The form which the "condition of England" question was to take in the thirties is already present in We Have Been Warned which was written at the beginning of the decade. Significant elements in this picture include the struggle for some definition of orthodoxy within the Left-wing movements, and the uncertainty as to whether Marxism and the Russian model provided such an orthodoxy; the belief in a socialist millenium which would bring about not just economic justice but social and personal liberation of the kind envisaged by William Morris in News from Nowhere (1891); and an all-pervading fear of war with the concomitant responses of militarism and pacifism. Notable too is the need among the

intelligentsia, normally of an upper or middle-class background, to identify with the working class, both by gathering the facts about their conditions of life and by generating preconceptions about working class aspirations and solidarity. 'We Have Been Warned' is about the tension between realistic experience and imaginative form in the mind of one intellectual turned political activist.

Most disturbing of all for writers of the nineteen thirties was the question of art. The pressure of the times led to a redefinition of the nature and purposes of art in which Naomi Mitchison shared. In 1925 when she embarked on the monumental 'The Corn King', Mitchison wrote to T.E.Lawrence that "fine writing" was what she most cared about,¹ and in the novel she adopts the modernist attitude of the artist's necessary isolation from society. But in 1933 she contributed a piece entitled "Anger against Books" to a volume of contemporary essays, and by 1934 she is commenting in a diary written in Vienna, in the wake of the abortive socialist rising;

So odd this newspaper world - writers, and yet
how unlike highbrow writers! Applied writing.
But can writing be ever 'pure'; like 'pure'
science? Perhaps some of the experimenters.
Gertrude Stein, Joyce - and at the moment I
simply can't feel they matter two pins. 2

Art, it was increasingly felt, ought to be committed and socially relevant: literature could only be justified if it was a mode of action,

1. Unpublished letter from Naomi Mitchison to T.E.Lawrence, undated but dateable to February 1925.

2. Naomi Mitchison 'Vienna Diary' (London, 1934) p.153.

achieving something in the real world. The danger of such an attitude was that aesthetic commitment could come to be labelled dilettante and art be converted into propaganda. In line with her political convictions, Mitchison devoted less mental energy to artistic endeavour in the thirties than she had done in the twenties and more to being an activist, fully aware that the volume and perhaps quality of her output would be affected.¹ However she did not succumb to the allures of propaganda. Mitchison's art had always had a directly moral dimension, and was, in fact, remarkably attuned to the kind of "parable art" which Hynes identifies as central to the artistic achievement of the decade.

Such art attempts to steer a middle course between dilettantism and didacticism by offering, in Hynes' phrase, "models of action" which clarify the feeling of the human issues without dictating them. Although primarily moral in intention, such works are non-realistic in form, deriving their structure from inherent themes rather than from fidelity to the observed world. In the words of Auden, who coined the term "parable art", the task of art

is not to tell people how to behave, but by drawing their attention to what the impersonal unconscious is trying to tell them, and by increasing their knowledge of good and evil, to render them better able to choose, to become increasingly morally responsible for their destiny. 2

There could be no more apt description for the aim, if not the

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1. "Even then I knew at the back of my mind that if I got really involved with politics it would be exceedingly bad for my writing." Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.182.
 2. W.H.Auden "Psychology and Art To-day" in Geoffrey Grigson (ed.) The Arts To-day (London, 1935) p.18.

achievement, of Naomi Mitchison's fiction in the nineteen thirties.

At first sight it might seem as if Mitchison's two principal works of this period, have little in common, since 'We Have Been Warned' (1935) is a contemporary novel with a political theme, and 'Blood of the Martyrs' (1939) a historical novel about the Early Church. However for Mitchison the two are complementary.

It is quite obvious that at present a great many people think with a 'religious' passion about politics; politics have a 'religious' importance. Political words are the words charged with a 'religious' emphasis, thought about with belief and dogma rather than intellectually, dispassionately and with the eighteenth-century spirit of compromise which was then thought appropriate to politics." 1

The contrast which, in this passage, is viewed historically, is seen as a matter of national temperament in the Vienna Diary of 1934.

..... possibly the same kind of thing is true of every country where politics is taken really seriously - either you are in the party or you do not have contact. But in England, as I keep on feeling more, politics are not taken seriously, even now." 2

"I like Lass' point of view; it is so English. She still thinks in some back part of her mind that she is being purely non-political. But I know I am working as a socialist, and I know it is valid." 3

But of the Welshman, Glyndwr,

"Also, he understood, as the English don't understand, this terrible religious sense which is constantly moulding one's forms of thought." 4

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1. Naomi Mitchison 'The Bull Calves' (London, 1947) p.462. The idea of a religious sense as opposed to religion is shared by other humanist thinkers of the period such as Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley.
 2. Naomi Mitchison 'Vienna Diary' (London, 1934) p.102-3.
 3. Ibid., p.142.
 4. Ibid., p.213.

Why does Mitchison equate political commitment with religious passion? Primarily, it is because both offer her a psychological coherence greater than that of the individual self - the kind of group solidarity ascribed by the anthropologists of her time to the tribal unit in primitive society. The value of such a communal identity is that, in Mitchison's view, it stands between the individual and the "infinite and everlasting" background";¹ it provides a sense of purpose, a "wall against unreality" (the kataleptike phantasia of the Stoics in The Corn King), and some sort of continuity to weigh against death. As Mitchison continues,

"But I know that I am working as a socialist and I know that it is valid. The sense of worth-while-ness, of a centre, of an answer to that Scot-troubling question - What is the Whole End of Man? - is with me constantly. The timor mortis which I find so bothering at ordinary times, has gone. 2

Further both religion and politics have for Mitchison, as manifestations of the group sense, a positive and a negative aspect: they are ambivalent quantities, varying according to the moral tone or atmosphere that informs their fundamental psychological energy. Mitchison's distinction is that between law and grace, or between ideology and community. On the one hand the group can be infiltrated by the powers of this world, by the bargaining spirit of mercantile culture; by rules, structures and repressions; by hierarchy and dogma; by false cults of the irrational; by money-power and the manipulation

1. Naomi Mitchison We Have Been Warned (London, 1935) p.438.

2. Naomi Mitchison Vienna Diary (London, 1934) p.142.

of human beings for non-human ends. This is the world of the Coke-Browns in "We Have Been Warned" which finds a reflection rather than a true antithesis in Communist ideology: the dictatorship of the ruling classes will be replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat; the materialism of one class by the materialism of another.

It is also the world of Imperial Rome in Blood of the Martyrs ; but on the other hand there is the Kingdom of Heaven where persons exist in right relationship to one another, co-operating in freedom and love, and recognising in humanity as defined by such community, the ultimate value of life. Enemies are to be forgiven and if possible reconciled but "things" - classes, structures and powers - are to be combatted. This, according to Mitchison, is the essence of Jesus of Nazareth's teaching, the practice of the Early Church, and the vision of socialism.¹

In We Have Been Warned, Mitchison is arguing against a narrow or rationalistic socialism, tending to Marxist materialism, which does not take account of moral value or the human quest for happiness. Political praxis must in her view include personal relationships and the group (religious with a small "r") instinct in man. The same debate runs like a thread through "Russia Diary",² an unpublished journal kept by Mitchison during her visit to the Soviet Union in 1932:

1. See Naomi Mitchison The Kingdom of Heaven (London, 1939) passim.

2. The only complete text of this unpublished work is in the author's possession. Extracts have been published in Margaret I. Postgate (ed.) 12 Studies in Soviet Russia (London, 1933) and Naomi Mitchison Mucking About (London, 1981).

Mirsky¹ says that I am in the half way stage that one always goes through before getting to Communism, that I am still thinking in terms of dope-emotions, the underground things, Lawrence-ism, the group sense, the pattern of happiness which is outside reason - opium for the people. But how can one intellectualise everything? - even put everything into words; we have only been using words for 40 to 50 thousand years, if that.²

Mitchison is also unhappy about the implications of dialectical materialism for the interpretation of history, feeling that although economic circumstances are instrumental in creating the character of a society, there are qualities of the human psyche ("daimons"), communal and individual, which have an existence independent of economic causation: "all groups have something non-economical which is value to them." ('Russia Diary' p.184).

In the novel the debate takes place within the consciousness of the principal character, Dione Galton, who is transparently Naomi Mitchison's alter ego. She stands between the repressive ideology of Donald MacLean, the Calvinist turned Communist, and the socialist leadership of her husband, Tom Galton, in which she has a subservient role as "the candidate's wife". Tom is the sacrificial king "to be broken and eaten for the people of Marshbrook Bridge." ('We Have Been Warned' p.80).

For the moment Tom Galton had the daimon in him and could give out the mana to them Again they crowded round and shook hands, and with Dione his queen, sharer in the mana-giving. She wanted to kiss them all, but knew that in England, and in that social environment, it would be shatteringly wrong.

('We Have Been Warned' pp.94-5)

1. Identification uncertain but possibly Prince Dmitry Svyatopolk, a Russian man of letters and author of 'A History of Russian Literature' (London, 1925).

2. Naomi Mitchison 'Russia Diary' p.4.

This anthropological imagery is extraneous to the social situation, dependent on Dione's perception and her "faith" in the cause and its leader.

'When Tom says like that, the Labour Movement, it makes my heart turn over, it makes me proud and angry. It is that generousness that made me want to marry Tom. It is a laying-open, an acceptance. It is sun and wind on Ardfeochan. His voice is gathering, gathering When Tom said, the Labour Movement, five years ago, I who had been hesitating, joined the Labour Party. I had been tormented by intellectual doubts; but when I took the step beyond doubt, when I got faith and declared myself, then I was happy When Tom is speaking about liberty I am possessed again.

(We Have Been Warned pp.64-5)

Despite such moments of sacramental communion and evangelical conversion, Dione remains a character with the capacity to choose; she is not wholeheartedly aligned with either the logic of the economic arguments or with the communality she detects in the Marshbrook Labour Party. The moral, intellectual and aesthetic values enshrined in her "privileged" lifestyle remain, when all is said and done, values. Dione's socialist activism matures as the novel progresses, but her portrayal vindicates the liberal virtues (intellectual impartiality, the respect for personal life and the aesthetic sense), while at the same time questioning whether these virtues are adequate to meet the challenge of the times. This contradiction is central to the novel.

In Blood of the Martyrs Mitchison works from the religious end of the equation, arguing for a humanistic, social and political interpretation of New Testament Christianity. The Kingdom of Heaven

is " 'Being fully ourselves towards one another: that is, letting what is of God become free of what men do to other men out of pride and greed.' " ('Blood of the Martyrs' p.461). Sin then is to be in the grip of the powers of this world and to behave accordingly. All in this condition are slaves, from the Emperor of Rome down, although paradoxically it is the actual slaves who have the greatest chance of release since they have least to lose. At the core of this creed are the deed and sayings of Jesus of Nazareth - not a Resurrected Lord in the mould of the mystery cults, but a man turned legend.

'One who lived for us who've lost hope and found it again and been reborn. Who promised that he would feed the hungry and give their turn to the humble and meek. Who will see there is equal justice at last, not one scale weighted. Not Romans and natives, Beric. Not masters and servants. Not ladies and whores.'

('Blood of the Martyrs' p.28)

With consistent panache, Mitchison redefines the key concepts of Pauline theology. Grace is to be in a state of right relationship with one's fellows; love and forgiveness are the bonds of human community as opposed to the might and coercion of Rome; to act with moral purpose is to serve Providence rather than Lady Luck and the superstitions of arbitrary chance which pervade the Graeco-Roman world; prayer is a concentration of the common will, emotion and intention. The sacraments are an intense symbolic sharing of the community experience from entry and catharsis (baptism), through mutual service (foot-washing) and love (the agape meal), to the final shared death which is Mitchison's replacement for the communion or eucharist.

The author's quarrel with Paul is part not only of the theme but of the subject-matter of the novel, since the apostle himself appears as a character. Disagreement centres on the Pauline theology of redemption as a sacrifice achieved by Christ's incarnation into the temporal sphere, but eternally valid for all men.

'Will it make any difference whether or not you get him into your Society or Church or whatever it is?'

'Most certainly it will! Either he accepts his redemption or he does not; if he does he has accepted an event for all eternity ...'

("Blood of the Martyrs" pp.416-7)

For Mitchison this Pauline assertion is supernatural religion and therefore undesirable, both because it invokes "some external non-human sanction", and because she considers the theological concept of sacrifice to be tinged with dark irrationality. Mitchison's unease with a religious emphasis on sacrifice¹ may have its origins in her own family background where her mother's devotion to the cause of nation and empire clashed with the moral rationalism of her Haldane father.

'Curious how the sacrifice idea went deep in the family. Was it the Jewish streak from my mother's side? It was quite different from the parallel but sensible idea that one must be prepared to take all risks, including that of one's life, for objectives that appear morally and intellectually sufficiently important.'²

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1. Compare Mitchison's divided attitude towards the death of Kleomenes in The Corn King and the Spring Queen (London, 1931) and her critique of religion ("the achievement of the Good by some magic and irrational means") in Naomi Mitchison The Moral Basis of Politics (London, 1938) p.287.
 2. Naomi Mitchison All Change Here (London, 1975) p.108.

The same conflict is portrayed in this psychoanalysis of Paul in
Blood of the Martyrs .

He was trying to break through a curious entanglement of childish images, connected in some way with his parents, a complex of love and blood and punishment and inexplicable forgiveness. It was something to do with Jesus Christ and the Kingdom, but he could not see just how. Sometimes he thought it was a plain mirroring; he longed then to be a child again, in direct relationship with all this, a good and chastised and forgiven child, sitting quietly on a Sabbath evening with the candles lit, aware that all is well ... And sometimes he shook this off, knowing that he was a man and part of something greater than any family, because it did not merely hold him with love, but must be made and shaped by his adult and unceasing efforts.

(Blood of the Martyrs p.410)

When Beric is eventually baptised in prison, it is not by Paul but by the comrades with whom he has humanly identified himself. As Agras tells Beric,

'It's - it's reason the kingdom. It's the only thing that makes sense of people being in the same world with one another.'

(Blood of the Martyrs p.92)

Supernaturalism, however, is not the only danger to which the fledgling kingdom is liable; the methods and attitudes of existing social structures are always ready to infiltrate the counter-cultural movement. Through Rhodon, the former Mithraist, comes the threat of ritual and ecclesiastical formalism; Manasses, the Jewish convert, still thinks in terms of law, and finds it hard to sympathise with Lalage's free use of sexuality as a means of comfort and healing. Beric, as one under the protection of the "masters", encounters a certain amount of class prejudice among the Christians who are almost

exclusively slaves or freedmen: the placing of Jesus in the succession of Spartacus, Eunus and Nabis, the socialist revolutionaries, undermines the enterprise of reconciliation among all men in favour of a first-century B.C. "dictatorship of the proletariat". At the opposite end of the social scale, Lalage fears the adoption of Christianity by the state and the eventual conversion of the religion of brotherhood into an instrument of oppression and exploitation.

All the foregoing are manifestly temptations to be shunned, but more insistent is the question as to whether the group solidarity of the church can bring life to a natural fulfillment. Can it provide a pattern which makes for happiness and one which satisfies not just the moral and social aspects of man's nature but the personal self also? Can, for instance, agape coexist with eros? Pride power and possession, it would seem, have no place in the Kingdom as it is under Roman rule. Beric and Agras experience only unhappiness when sexual attraction intrudes into their relationship, while Beric and Lalage, the hero and heroine, are checked in their feelings for each other by the tangible absence of a sexual bond. Nor, though by strength of psyche natural leaders (kings and queens), are they the actual leaders of the Christian group. It is the more limited personalities who are able to hold to the course of humility and love required if the powerless are to gain the moral victory.

The pattern of natural fulfillment is represented in the novel by fundamental psychological types which, though relegated to the background, are similar to those employed in The Corn King and the Spring Queen. Eunice is the mother figure, but her love for her son

Phaon must be restrained lest it weaken their resolution to act exclusively for the good of the Church. Phaon and Persis are the youth and maiden whose survival symbolises the future of the Church - a future which Mitchison is not prepared to let depend on the martyrs example alone. The female or queenly role is played by both Claudia Acte and Lalage, who are linked by the goddess Cleopatra-Isis. Lalage is a one-time worshipper of Isis and shows practical compassion, while Acte is a remote figure whose acts of mercy resemble the visitations of the goddess herself. This strain of feminine wisdom, suffering and healing balances the masculine orientation of the Jesus stories in a manner designed intentionally to contrast with the later cult of the Virgin Mary: Cleopatra was a mighty and sexually potent queen.

The main qualification of the Christian temperament is Beric who is a prince and a barbarian. He too is in the bondage of Rome but unlike the slaves he has the power to act and does so on two important occasions. Without qualm or hesitation he dispatches the miserable informer, Sotion, and as the crisis for the Church approaches, he tries to save the Christians by assassinating Tigellinus, the Praetorian commander. Despite his mixed motives in the second instance (he is also revenging himself on Flavia), neither of these actions is necessarily wrong except from the point of view of the powerless. Gallio regrets that Beric did not succeed, but the kingdom of the meek cannot be achieved on the world's terms, only on its own: the pacifist conscience may not be sufficient to bring in the socialist millenium.

It is significant that Beric does not become a member of the

Church until he is imprisoned and helpless along with the slaves. Before then his identification with the Kingdom is a matter of individual choice; at one juncture he feels that he may achieve more by retaining his privileged position and working through rather than against the social order, as Crispus and his fellow conspirators do. Such freedom to choose is the liberal prerogative and a valuable one, but it is not appropriate to the oppressed.

.... but was he sorry that Sotion was dead? The man was certainly better out of the way, wasn't he? If they'd all forgiven him, would he possibly have become different? Would he not have given any more names? It was so very unlikely that anyone would change that much, that you couldn't take it into account. Or could you? The prisoners could forgive him because it was the only thing they could do about him, the only action they could take. But he, Beric, he'd had a choice of actions.

(Blood of the Martyrs p.325)

The way of the Kingdom is through the Pauline paradox of grace¹ - of strength in weakness and freedom under the imperative of God's love - which is transposed by Mitchison into the field of human action. Although Beric has difficulty living as a member of the Church, he is enabled to die as one and thus to fulfill the greatest of the paradoxes, that of renewed life through death. The contradictions of his existence are resolved because the circumstances demand a single and ultimate response.

The need for a clear response to an extreme situation dominates

1. Romans 6 (v.20-23), I Corinthians 1 (v.26-29), and II Corinthians 12 (v.9-10).

"Blood of the Martyrs" which was written in the shadow of tyranny in Germany and Austria, and completed as war and possibly German invasion became unavoidable.¹ There is no major consciousness such as Dione in the novel to provide a focus for the investigation of value, since history had intervened in the patterns of fulfillment and put the individual under compulsion. Mitchison's vision is restrained and disciplined to meet the challenge of the times, and the issues are consequently simplified.

This is the principal distinction between "We Have Been Warned" and "Blood of the Martyrs", since in the latter Beric's individuality is developed only so far as the overall structure of the novel requires, the main conflict being between the contrasting group mentalities to which he owes allegiance. The play of values in the earlier novel is situated within the individual consciousness - that of Dione and her mental yoke-fellow, Phoebe. While Dione is torn between the values of her personal life and the demands of group commitment, Phoebe lives through her imagination and exercises her artistic craft, with no thought for the moral validity of her life or activity, only for the quality of the end product. She is a standard bearer for aesthetic beauty and for the contribution of the imagination to personal and social life.

Within "We Have Been Warned" the imagination is represented and

1. "Of course it ("Blood of the Martyrs") is really dope and I am doing it so as not to think about other things I hope I shall finish it before I am put into a concentration camp." Unpublished letter from Naomi Mitchison to her mother, Louisa Kathleen Haldane, undated, but dateable to the late autumn of 1938. Mitchison was in fact included on a Nazi "proscription" list.

embodied through symbols. For Mitchison symbols are the psychic analogue of art rather than merely one of its raw materials, because symbols are the go-between of the unconscious and the conscious mind. They are psychically charged and thus a major source of the heightening and tension which converts "a series of events" into a narrative, which clothes "naked historical action" with "the garb of significant stories or mythology".¹ The function of symbols belongs not only to art but to the wider exchange between man and "the infinite and everlasting background",² in which art has a part to play and of which individual symbols are the coinage. In We Have Been Warned Mitchison employs the imaginative awareness of Dione and Phoebe in order to experiment with symbolism, and to attempt a translation of the anthropological or "mythic" method of The Corn King into a more directly contemporary creativity.

At one point in the novel, Phoebe is working in her studio when the inwardness of her artistic concentration and the nature of the material on which she is working (illustrations for the fairy story "Kay and Gerda") provokes a sudden invasion of psychic energy, expressed in a confused rush of images and symbols.

All the dream things in the witch's garden, the narcissus, the snowdrop, the tiger lily, the talking crow, the gules lion, only not the rose because she'd lost Phil, no Kay, and when the rose bush came up she was so frightened of all the things that came up with it, that came at her from all sides of the witch's garden, the kelpies

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) pp.516-7.

2. See Note 1 on p.129.

out of the earth and the Campbell Women walking quickly along behind the lilies to cut her off and the Elephant lumbering from among the cabbages, that Gerda ran and ran and jumped into the boat.*

(We Have Been Warned p.163)

The runaway pace of this rapid, illogical sequence of symbols indicates fear, indeed panic, and the operation of some impersonal psychic force rather than the control of the perceiving, imagining self.

She ran between bushes of fading wild laurel; the stems had been cut through, les lauriers sont coupes. She saw between them the gules lion asleep, lying on a thistle bed, and Saint Finnigal asleep, standing with her eyes open but blank. For a time she swam in a sea full of seals, coughing at her with musty breath, the smell of the seal islands off Jura. The seals asked her questions, mocked her for never having waked the lion, never having held Basileia so tight that they had become one for ever, and for ever lived on high among the shining names of Cloud Cuckoo Borough.

(We Have Been Warned p.165)

All of these symbols recur in the novel and they fall into two main categories. On the one hand are those drawn from fairy tale and fable, and employed in a private but significant fantasy world. The problem with such signs is that, unlike symbols proper, they must be explained, since they are supported neither by an appeal to sense experience, nor by a background of understanding shared by the reader: Mitchison provides just such a key.

But later on Phoebe and Dione had seen that Peisthetairos, that determined and persuasive man, was Intellect and Imagination applied to life, especially to dealings with people: that the Talking Crow was the Daemon - the voice of reality one has to follow: and that Basileia was Power or Grace or Conscious Happiness, or whatever combination of the three it is that

comes suddenly to those people who have used Intellect and Imagination for the good of life, of the Birds, for the Citizens of Cloud Cuckoo Borough. But Phoebe's identification of the Hoopoe with the Scientific Intellect was accidental, and in some way connected with Phil Bickerden."

(We Have Been Warned pp.8-9)

Phoebe and Dione have adopted these figures from a Greek vase illustrating "The Birds" of Aristophanes, but the meanings assigned to them are personal and more or less arbitrary. In like vein, the gules lion stands (with heraldic decorum) for Scotland, and the Elephant for the repression of some part of experience which loyalty to a human grouping or creed seems always to require.

A further weakness of these images is that to be effective within the novel, they must generate their own narratives - a demand which Mitchison fails to reconcile with her overall narrative enterprise.¹ The imaginative world which Phoebe enters is a topsy-turvy, Lewis Carroll-like, middle ground between commonsense reality and the supernatural "other side" of the fairy tale, but this tone is not taken up elsewhere in the novel, and it appears in consequence a whimsical indulgence. Phoebe's "stream of consciousness" is an isolated luxury of the liberal imagination which the author cannot really afford.

1. "Phil came riding by in armour; he had a clever plan to rescue Phoebe; he was going to dig right under the root of minus one and come out in the middle of the Tower ..." (We Have Been Warned p.167). For a more successful treatment of the stream of consciousness see Naomi Mitchison Beyond this Limit (London, 1935) in which the Phoebe of the novel is given free rein.

There is, however, another class of image in the sequence which attains to a more than personal significance because it possesses a cultural background. One example of this group is the Campbell Women, the witch-hunters or orthodox, concealing behind their facade of bourgeois respectability a viciousness towards all or any that threaten their security and their status. They are the witch persecutors of Scottish tradition, notably of Jean MacLean, Dione and Phoebe's ancestor, but as Phoebe herself is aware, they transcend cultural boundaries.

As she grew older Phoebe had begun to realise that none of these images was really private to her sister and herself. Whatever he had chosen to call them, Cocteau had certainly drawn pictures of the Campbell Women, stiff and faceless with cruelty and ignorance.

(We Have Been Warned pp.32-3)

In addition to providing the reader with a culturally, and therefore potentially accessible, context for this symbol, Mitchison locates and supports it in her narrative with the language and imagery of nightmare.

It was not sight, not touch; it was a fingering along the wall; she leaned forward to the window and as her face neared it on one side of the glass, the faces of the Campbell Women looked in and nodded to her from the other.

(We Have Been Warned p.163)

This can be compared to the treatment of the seals and kelpies, images belonging to the same Scottish Gaelic background as the Campbell Women, and given similar symbolic extension through the unconscious fears which they tap. These terrors are again indicated by the sensations of nightmare.

The seals dived away from her, streakily, sleekly, a humping of shoulders and flipping of seal tails, salt sea-smelling water splashed over Phoebe, blinding her, and oh, oh, the arms of the kelpies feeling up for her through deep water, hooking on to her ankles! Oh, close the shore, and the dark, weed-hung rocks of Jura, and, on shore, smiling, waiting for her, the Campbell Women.

("We Have Been Warned" p.166)

Despite the weakness of the interjections, this has enough of the west coast of Scotland in threatening mood, and of the universal fear of drowning, to render it disturbing. The seals convey the physical horror of being jostled, crowded and submerged.

The dominance of sea and water imagery is of particular interest since Jung associates the sea with the searching of the soul and with its descent into the unconscious¹ - a descent often provoked by an unbearably painful experience such as the end of her love affair is causing Phoebe. Moreover Mitchison's use of language demonstrates Jung's emphasis on the perils which are attendant upon such a descent: the energy of the libido is amoral and therefore always ambiguous in its effects on personal life. Mitchison herself was later to cite this passage as an example of how close she was to Jung's outlook before she had read any of his works or absorbed his ideas.² Phoebe's psychic adventure begins in her picture of Gerda's boat, moves through several water experiences, and accelerates in a rush of tides and whirlpools towards a descent.

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works translated R.F.C.Hull, Vol.5 pp.207-273.

2. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1934) p.213.

The river flowed swift and silent, swifter than the Cher in flood time, than ebb tide down the Thames, swift and twisted like the currents between the islands, past Jura, past Islay and Colonsay and the Outer Islands; the river was going over a fall, the water swept to the fall as the salt water sweeps past Jura to Corryvreckan In Gerda's boat, her knuckles white on the thwarts as Gerda's had been, Phoebe went over the falls.

(We Have Been Warned p.169)

Water also predominates in a very different passage, near the beginning of the novel, when Phoebe falls into a muse, her mind moving naturally from one place to another, linked always by the motif of flowing water. The stream of memory begins at Oxford.

'It was at the beginning of the Michaelmas term, the most stilled and magic time; the water was deep green and so smooth that she had to insert her hands deftly and quietly so as not to ripple it. On the surface there were golden poplar leaves; when she leaned down towards it she became dizzy with the breathing out of cold autumn-sweet air from that clay-bedded river, from the water that soaked through ripening bramble hedges and down the aged boles of thorn trees ... and would in time slither down, looping south to Oxford past flat-meadows and osiers and boat-houses, that would in time reflect Magdalen tower and Magdalen bridge

(We Have Been Warned p.11)

Here the perceiving self, sense experience and memory are to the fore, although carried along on a gentle associative undercurrent. The language is that of the prose poem, employing vowel melody, onomatopoeia and rhythm to convey the sensation of drifting through the autumnal beauty of the Oxfordshire countryside. The passage is an idyll for the civilised values represented by the peaceful stability of "Magdalen tower and Magdalen bridge" and the interaction of the college with its

natural surroundings, equally shaped by time and culture. The perception and enjoyment of such beauty is the privilege of the liberal consciousness.

In sharp contrast, though deriving ultimately from the same source, is the river in Tom's Sallington constituency.

... the evil Marsh-brook, rising out of a chain of ponds where the Barton's End children sailed boats in summer, and dipping into the channel that had been dug and faced for it by afraid people, and sometimes allowing itself to be bricked over, but not for long. In winter the Marsh-brook hunched itself and hunched itself and burst up through manholes and drainpipes, and quietly and successfully flooded the houses in Carisbrook Road. The houses were flooded three deep in brown and filthy smelling water. Dead kittens and sticks and bottles floated about in the corners, and the children got sore throats, and the old people died off.

(We Have Been Warned p.12)

The harmony of man and nature is not apparently open to all. The water is the same water of life as flowed in the River Cher, nurturing the civilisation of Oxford, but here it is channelled and degraded, and in consequence throws up the detritus and offal of both society and the psyche.

There are also the waters of Scotland: the Highland water of spring and well, the Western sea, and the ship-carrying water of the Clyde. Each description is marked by the same poetic quality, and by an attention to perceptual detail combined with an underlying thematic intent. It is necessary to read the whole passage consecutively in order to sense how patiently and accurately Mitchison has worked from the visual detail and actuality of landscape to create an impression

of the potentiality of nature and of human life, which unites the different locations of the novel. In these paragraphs she penetrates a collective symbolic dimension through and by means of individual awareness, without overworking particular symbols or asserting a significance which she has not in fact evoked.

The difficulty with this meditative prose poem is that, instead of providing the rest of the novel with an imaginative coherence, as it is intended to do, it is isolated from its context by the fineness of its technique and the achievement of its language. Correspondingly Phoebe is, in retrospect, irrelevant to the mainstream of the novel. She is less an alternative point of view than an appendage to Dione, representing an aspect of life which the central consciousness underplays and which becomes increasingly peripheral. The importance placed in Phoebe's thoughts on Scotland, Highland and Lowland, as a source of corporate unity and symbolism, illustrates her subordinate and compensatory, as opposed to complementary, function. Dione's contrasting view of Scotland is based almost exclusively on Aucharnish; she acknowledges intellectually a stirring of vitality in Scotland but feels herself blocked off from the national movement by her narrow class inheritance and by the conservatism endemic in the Highlands.

· It was as though she were being pulled backwards,
half reluctant and half eager, back from the
glitter of snow or silver, back from the blue
lochs and clear air of Scotland to somewhere that
had become in a way closer to her, back to the
factories and the little rows of ugly houses
..... and the Labour Movement at Marshbrook
Bridge Saint Finnigal and Scotland
could no longer give her what she wanted. The
kelpies belonged to the other people

Dione turns to the English Labour Party just as Donald MacLean turns from his cultural inheritance to Communism and Russia, and the novel as a whole moves with them, leaving Phoebe's musings as an unfulfilled and neglected promise.

One of the reasons for Phoebe receiving a smaller role in the later stages of the novel is the emergence, within the text, of a critique of the irrational. Although the structure of the novel is that of a Romance quest, signposted by the motifs from 'A Pilgrim's Progress', which head each chapter, Dione's anthropological imagery is steadily undermined. The idea, for instance, of Tom as a king, hero and saviour is specifically disavowed by Dione herself.

'You aren't a kind of magic person from on top and you've stopped wanting to be a surprise Tom, you've changed. They've changed you. And me. Or Something has.'

('We Have Been Warned' p.480)

This ties in with a comment in the 'Vienna Diary' (1934) to the effect that those endowed with "this terrible religious sense, which is continuously moulding one's forms of thought", must be strict with themselves.

'... too strict to allow of any redeemer, Jesus or Lenin or Wallisch or Weisel; one has to go through it all by oneself, although in the company of the Genossen, the comrades.' 1

Similarly Dione's view of her Russian experiences as an initiation, a death and rebirth of the self, is extensively qualified. The ideal

1. Naomi Mitchison 'Vienna Diary' (London, 1934) p.213.

of such a "socialist" initiation can be gleaned again from the pages of the Vienna Diary.

I suspect they've both¹ got to go through hell before they can cease being individualists. For they realise intellectually that one mustn't be, that one can't begin to lead the good life while one is, but before any man or woman can really do that, he or she must be put through the mangle. I expect these two have got to be hurt, and made to feel worthless and alone, and generally pulled to pieces; and they've got to accept it too, not struggle against it, and then they can build up into a different kind of existence in which they will have accepted and been accepted by some community-something with bigger and more beautiful and less easily understandable values than the individualist ones.²

This is how Dione would like to see what happened to her in Russia, as she tells her sister-in-law, Muriel.

'But yes - I do feel a bit chewed up, what with all I saw, and Tom and Oksana, and now this. I'd like to start everything afresh. Only how can I? I wonder if people felt like this in Eleusis after Initiation. There must have been a good deal of chawing up on that. You had to die and then be reborn. It all seems silly and unreal to us now, what one knows of the ceremonial, yet perhaps it was rather like a month under the Soviets.'

'Well, I'm glad you realise that all this Communism is a religion exactly the same as all its forerunners.'

(We Have Been Warned p.345)

Muriel's reply is indicative of her solid good sense and her insistence on the need for intellectual objectivity and individual freedom. She does think that Dione has been changed by Russia, but only to the extent of returning "all romantic about Communism". Equally damning

1. Hugh Gaitskell and R. Elwyn Jones, referred to in Vienna Diary as Evert and Glyndwr, respectively.

2. Naomi Mitchison Vienna Diary (London, 1934) p.207.

is the highland nurse's respectful but firm remark about the trip.

'You put too much on that, if you don't mind me saying so,' Nurse said; 'it was like - the way Kenneth looks forward to Christmas.'

("We Have Been Warned" p.370)

There is no doubting the emotional impact of the Russian journey on Dione; every moment is measured against the one burning question of whether this is Utopia - the Kingdom of Heaven. At the same time she is possessed by a will to believe, a sense of happiness and faith modified only by her habit of empirical observation which registers the queues, the muddle, the hardship for working women still running a home, and the abortion without anaesthetics. A similar ambivalence dominates the Russia Diary kept by Mitchison on her own trip to the U.S.S.R. in 1932.

'Every Big, every new thing in the history of mankind's ideas has meant a difficult acceptance, a giving up something old and dear. We cannot expect the future to be just a broadening out, not just like that part of the present which we approve of without the part which we hate - as most hopeful visionaries have seen it. It is bound to be difficult, to be something shocking to us as we should be shocking to our ancestors. Yet in what way will it be shocking? Can we be at all sure that it will be this way? For there is much that is shocking here, yet, if I were certain it was the way of the future, I would try very hard to accept it. But what proof is there? How can I tell if this new thing is god or devilry? Gods and devils say the same thing: 'Cast yourself down, no harm will come!' How alike they whisper it! There is no objective really, no intellectual solution
..... 1

1. Naomi Mitchison "Russia Diary" p.175.

The difference between the authoress of the Russia Diary and her alter ego Dione, is that Dione is less honest about this ambivalence. She is in a state of considerable uncertainty, but insists on labelling it "compromise". She convinces herself that it is her duty as a "socialist" woman to allow the sexually repressed Donald to make love to her, checking her reluctance by calling it middle-class fastidiousness. Finally she manoeuvres herself into the totally false position of being encouraging and positive towards her husband's love affair with the beautiful socialist maiden, Oksana. Dione's emotional compulsion to discover "freedom and brotherhood" causes her to ride roughshod over the realities of her own personality.

Mitchison does not completely abandon the idea of the Russian experience as an initiation which leaves Tom and Dione more independent of conventional ties and therefore freer to act for the common good, but there is also evidence in the novel to suggest that it is Dione's return to England and to Marshbrook Bridge which is her true initiation. The Russian section of the novel is entitled "The House of the Interpreter to the House Beautiful" but the following section is "The Valley of Humiliation, by Vanity Fair, to Doubting Castle". In other words, translating Bunyan's motifs into the parallel stages of Dione's quest, the Russian trip is like a glimpse in parable form into the future and a foretaste of the trials, the decisions and possibly the achievements which lie ahead; the return to England is the beginning of the tests of real experience.

Immediately on arrival, Dione discovers that someone other than Donald has been arrested for the Sallington murder, and she is compelled

to use the credibility lent by her social position in order to clear the innocent man. Back in Marshbrook Bridge her attempt to treat one of the local comrades as she feels she ought to have treated Donald, leads to a brutal abuse of her trust. Finally, during the demonstration of the Hunger Marchers in London, she does nothing more heroic than lose her temper and try, with some ineffectiveness and loss of dignity, to assault a supercilious bystander.

At the same time Dione finds a realistic role for herself in the constituency, forming genuine friendships and making herself useful in a quiet and practical way. She now realises the limitations of the local Labour Party and of what she and Tom can do for it, and this realisation is accompanied by a reaffirmation of her own life regardless of its class denominator. When Tom himself returns from Russia impatient of the gradualism of the Labour movement, it is Dione who refuses to let him become disillusioned; she has come to see that action in the world of reality must of necessity involve ambiguity and compromise - the coexistence of faith and scepticism.

Dione's final break with a false sense of group ideology comes when, having almost browbeaten herself into undergoing an abortion on "socialist" grounds, she surrenders to the delight of being pregnant and the hope engendered by the prospect of a new life. The baby grows with the Spring of a new year so to this extent Dione is allowed a personal fulfilment, but the strands of the novel soon suffer a radical dislocation, and a quite different ending is projected for the Labour Party at Marshbrook Bridge and for British society as a whole.

The reason for Mitchison's shift in attitude towards symbolism and the irrational, in the early years of the decade, is not hard to detect. In 1931 when Mitchison finished "The Corn King and the Spring Queen" and began "We Have Been Warned", she was still in the backwash of the liberating, romantic rediscovery of a godhead within the self, associated with D.H. Lawrence. This atmosphere is still prevalent in the Russia Diary of thirty-two.

Lawrence didn't like politics or earnestness and this is damned earnest So much of this strikes one as intellectually true where Lawrence is true of the heart and the body: one is pulled about. Why should the intellect have it all its own way? 1

But by Spring 1933, when the second half of "We Have Been Warned" was in the making, the Nazis were poised to take over power in Germany, and the Reichstag fire, which occurred on 27th February 1933, figures as an ominous news item in the later stages of the novel. With 1934 came the suppression of the socialists in Austria, and already in the Vienna Diary of that year, Mitchison speaks of a dark tide of fascism engulfing Europe.²

Works written at the end of the decade - The Moral Basis of Politics (1938), The Kingdom of Heaven (1939), and Blood of the Martyrs (1939) - develop a critique of supernaturalism and the dark irrational, stressing freedom, moral responsibility and reason against "the instruments of the unconscious". The primitivism so admired in

1. Naomi Mitchison Russia Diary p.85.

2. Naomi Mitchison Vienna Diary (London, 1934) p.210.

its literary and artistic forms, must be attacked as a death-wish, a regression through fear and insecurity into the enveloping darkness of the primal womb.¹ This is the tangle of punishments, rewards and blood in which Mitchison accuses Paul of being enmeshed.

To represent this change as a complete volte face would be unjust: Mitchison was compelled by the direction of events to redefine and restructure her ideas about the irrational, but she transposed rather than abandoned her previous insights. The process of redefinition is accomplished in The Moral Basis of Politics, and its fruits are apparent in Blood of the Martyrs. Mitchison's basic position remains that of the evolutionist, for whom reason and language are relatively recent acquisitions of homo sapiens and as yet blunt tools for the tasks assigned to them. In We Have Been Warned, amidst her frantic activism, Dione has a moment of intense reflection on, as she terms it, the ultimate "why" of human existence "what is the whole end of man?".

... if only the engine-driver could get out and look around, unobscured by these eye-lenses and ear-drums and nerves and brain between one's self (as one calls the engine-driver), and the thing one is experiencing, if only the engine-driver could get a perspective and see what life is all about - look round, take notes, nod to himself and then come back into the body But that doesn't happen. One's thought pushed deeper into one instead of coming out the back as it feels like doing No, Dione, the mere fact that you have that picture at all shows what a low level of civilisation you're really at - you haven't taken in the thought of the last three centuries at all - you're still obsessed with

1. Naomi Mitchison The Kingdom of Heaven pp.140-157.

primitiveness; you're seeing Keres, as the first of the Greeks saw them three thousand years ago. After all, you're not much further on than they were. What's three thousand years? A hundred generations perhaps, no time for mutations, for any real alteration in human structure."

("We Have Been Warned" pp.439-440)

In other words, there remains a tacit dimension to human life, a well at the centre of the psyche, or the unconscious.

In "The Moral Basis of Politics", Mitchison identifies certain positive features of moral experience relevant to politics which cannot be adjudged strictly rational, and yet ought not to be denigrated as "magic and irrationality". One of these is the experience of "catharsis" which Mitchison sees underlying conversion in Christianity, Socratic self-discovery and the experience which Aristotle in his Poetics ascribes to the spectators of tragic drama. It is, Mitchison defines, "essentially a shifting of the focus from the immediate field of the self to the outer field in which moral judgements happen."¹ Through tragedy, she connects such catharsis with the theme of kings who die for their people since, she argues, it is often through such a tragic death or sacrifice that catharsis is achieved in the minds of others.

Another non-rational feature of moral experience is the existence of a strong communal loyalty or group bond within which, Mitchison suggests, individual catharsis often takes place. Such a loyalty, or

1. Naomi Mitchison "The Moral Basis of Politics" (London, 1938) p.287.

as Mitchison also describes it "mythology" since it is often sealed with myth and story, is alogical, but, as long as it does not demand the concept of an exterior non-human entity, escapes the charge of supernaturalism. Later Mitchison's thinking about this group sense developed along Jungian lines, positing a "collective unconscious" as the means and source of a psychic coherence underlying and influencing the conscious self. A third aspect of experience which Mitchison pinpoints is the possession of a value so highly esteemed that people are prepared to die for the sake of its preservation. The danger of such conviction is that the value, even a man-centred one such as the sacredness of human life, may become abstracted from its existence as a quality in people's behaviour. Nevertheless the possession of such values is, for Mitchison, a moral and social plus, countering materialism, individualism and the fear of death.

In Blood of the Martyrs Argas enjoys an intense experience of catharsis.

"They all gathered round the edge and the two young men, the Jew and the Greek, stripped; Josias took their tunics over his arm and Phaon held the lantern out as far as he could reach over the water. Here the flooded river was running too quick to freeze, but the steps were slippery and they gasped with cold as they went in, holding on to one another. They looked white and thin in the lantern light, stepping down into that tearing bubble and stick-streaked water, opaquely dark with mud. Josias watched anxiously as Manasses, leading, went down waist-deep. The steps ended and they were on mud and the river tore at them and they were almost out of the circle of lantern light, out of reach of the others. As the icy water bit on his loins and stomach it seemed to Argas that it was indeed the river of death and defeat; he could have flung himself down on to it, arms at sides, not swimming. He did not know what Manasses was saying to him. He only felt worthless, sick

with himself; there was nothing right about him. They were breast-deep now, staggering in the current. He felt Manasses's hands on his shoulders, weighing on him like sin; his feet sunk into the sucking mud. He heard Manasses saying "into the name of Jesus." And, with that name in his mind, he went down into the water, dark, choking, over his head and tear-hot face; he struggled up, towards the name of Jesus; three times Manasses ducked him; three times he felt the cold and darkness of death and each time his body seemed to die a little, until he came up the third time he felt nothing, but was only aware of the name that had been with him under the water, and heard his own voice shouting it. And then Manasses was pushing him back, out of the mud, out of the pull on legs and body of the black, drowning water. And he was going up, up, into lantern light and among faces, and the water streamed off him, out of his hair and ears and nostrils, taking away with it everything that he had finished with.

("Blood of the Martyrs" pp.84-5)

In accord with Mitchison's humanisation of Pauline theology, baptism is interpreted as a death and rebirth, symbolised by the descent into the water. Argas visibly and tangibly departs from the community and, as he leaves them on the bank, he is bereft of the life which they offer and appears as a ghost, "white and thin". The kind of death which Mitchison wishes to represent is a moral experience of "loneliness and defeat", so the passage refers outside itself to what the novel has already established about Argas and his desertion of the Church rather than attempting to penetrate beyond moral experience into the region of the impersonal and numinous unconscious - "He only felt worthless, sick with himself; there was nothing right about him." This is analogous to the Pauline sense of sin which alienates man from himself and from his community, and to the kind of initiation which Mitchison sees as lying between the individualistic condition and that of the convinced socialist; "I expect these two have got to be hurt,

and made to feel worthless and alone".¹ Argas' emergence from the river is a return to the community, "into lantern light and among faces."

Argas' experience also has a strictly physical aspect which is very prominent in the description: the slippery steps, the icy water, the current, the "sucking mud", Manasses' pushing hands, and the final sensation of drowning are what render the prose vivid and memorable. Even the quasi-Pauline "death of the body" is equated with the numbing effect of the cold. In this way the suggestive resonance of the water, used to such symbolic effect in Phoebe's meditation in We Have Been Warned, is controlled and confined to its physical aspect in order that there may be no confusion about the signals of moral interpretation which Mitchison has provided. The language is tightly interlocked into the narrative themes of the novel in a way that Phoebe's thoughts are not.

Argas' shift of focus or catharsis is particularly compressed and intense due to the urgency of his own emotions (Church procedure is waived in order that he can be baptised immediately), but the passage also offers a paradigm for Beric's experience throughout the novel. The pattern is filled out by a greater measure of individual realism and by the fluctuation of Beric's intentions, but the main lines are identical. Beric's own baptism does not occur until near the end of the novel but Mitchison stresses that the actual baptism is only the

1. See note 2 p.149 above.

summing up of a series of human experiences, and the recognition of a state of right relationship to which Beric has already attained.

He stood up again. It had not been magic nor childish. He was not suddenly changed. It was a sign that marked a change which had been happening and was now complete.

(Blood of the Martyrs p.430)

The catharses of Argas and Beric are shifts of focus from an individual point of view to that of the group and can only be understood against the background of everything the novel conveys concerning the life of the nascent Kingdom of God, the community from which Argas departs as a separate being but to which he returns as an integrated member. The communal experience of the Church is a moral one of simple kindness, friendliness and practical support but it is also something more: the individuals concerned feel themselves to be part of a greater whole. This is expressed as being part of "the Will" or as being moved the "the Spirit" ("some unknown and unmeasured power")¹ but in neither case is the will or spirit conceived of as being exterior to the sum of human persons that composes the community. These religious terms are taken from the Christian context in order to describe a quality or dimension of experience which human beings can discover and share when they come together harmoniously.

She took off the veil and laid it by, and then all of them came close round the table with the bread and the fish and the little meat rolls which Sapphira had cooked, and they held one another's hands. Argas, too, had kissed Persis, feeling curiously glad and assuaged at seeing

1. Naomi Mitchison Blood of the Martyrs (London, 1939) p.217.

her again. Every time they met together was something snatched by them from the powers of darkness, something solid that could never be taken from them again. He had a consciousness of the two-way flow of time, anchoring them in eternity. If you had this after all, what did it matter about dying? Death could not alter things that had happened."

(Blood of the Martyrs p.290)

The sense of group unity is represented here in terms of the antithesis of time and eternity, and life and death. The latter is again a variant on the Pauline contrast between "life in Christ" and death as sin or life lived through the old self - a contrast which differs paradoxically from the biological antithesis of life and death. The image of two time dimensions, the one in which man normally subsists and the other, radically different but contiguous, into which he may suddenly penetrate, is a scientific form of language but is used as a metaphor for experience. In fact the time metaphor is parallel to that of levels or depths of experience which Mitchison, in her concern to adhere to "the outer field in which moral judgements happen", avoids.

Linguistically, Mitchison employs rhythm and assonance to capture the emotional tone and atmosphere (see for example the lilt and flow of "curiously glad and assuaged"), but she deliberately abjures the ritual analogues which she eagerly exploited in The Corn King. The "bread and the fish and the little meat rolls" evoke the Eucharistic symbolism only to deny its transcendent reference in favour of a consistent empiricism. Group loyalty is a phenomenon, Mitchison implies in The Moral Basis of Politics, which might usefully be studied scientifically by psychology.

The Christians, including Beric, are eventually martyred for this quality of experience rather than for an idea or creed. Their willingness to endure physical pain and death is a vindication of their awareness of a life which is more than material and more than individual. Appropriately it is Paul, the author of the "life in death" paradox, who urges them on to their "crucifixion".

When he saw the worst need, he would walk by someone or some group, urging them to courage and faith and above all remembrance of their love for one another, pulling it up into their minds past the terror and pain; they had known all along in the love-feasts and the crossing of the threshold that happened there, how this put them for ever beyond death.

(We Have Been Warned p.435)

Their moral steadfastness testifies to the experience that has inspired it, and encourages others to seek the same experience, thus perpetuating the community.

The possession of such a group loyalty or "mythology" is, from Mitchison's standpoint, a necessary part of the balanced personality. Its absence leaves a vacuum which is in danger of being filled by a false cult of the irrational or the worship of power. Rome has lost her gods and the common will to service of the state, and the vacuum is filled by Nero, who with a mixture of megalomania and adroit manipulation, exploits the "natural wish of the people for gods and the gifts of the gods, the natural wish for a leader." (Blood of the Martyrs p.308).

'I feel like a god,' said Nero, 'sometimes. Coming into the Arena, slowly, grandly, at the head of the great procession serpent-stretching behind me, lifted on the voices, the closing, rising cheers, the love, lifted above the sand

that is so soon to take the blood
 I am the Will of Rome and the people know
 it, the ordinary people who love me. For
 whom I make the great blood sacrifice."

("Blood of the Martyrs" p.307)

This is opium for the mass unconscious, while for the educated individual there is the corruption of power: Beric comments on Flavia.

What had her father done that she should want to hurt him? Not brought her up, he thought, remembering what Domina Aelia had said, not shown her anything worth dying for. So she's taken to power: power over people, because she's a woman. But if she'd been a man it would have been power over money and politics.

("Blood of the Martyrs" p.321)

The contemporary comparison with Nazi Germany is omnipresent but it is a thematic rather than historical link. Mitchison's argument is that goodness must involve an element of unreason "so as to make a hold on the unreason in the human soul" (Blood of the Martyrs p.475). Otherwise the powers of the dark unconscious will take control.

Yet although peoples' motives are not reasonable, Mitchison feels that they ought to be in the direction of reason and love. In this one must hear the voice not just of the socialist but of the agnostic humanist with a belief in the perfectibility of man, and of the rational evolutionist who equates the development of consciousness, at least in broad outline, with progress. In bringing clarity and force to her testament of moral and political faith, in the teeth of history, Mitchison involves herself in some necessary simplification. The interplay of the positive and negative aspects of the irrational self, which is explored in We Have Been Warned, through the medium of Phoebe, is neglected in Blood of the Martyrs. Mitchison

concentrates on the collective dimension of human existence and achieves in consequence a unified and integrated literary artefact, but there may also be an element of special pleading. If the energy of the unconscious is active within the individual psyche, oblivious of moral distinction, as Jung holds it to be, then the origin of evil cannot wholly be laid at the door of a corrupt social order, and the Kingdom of Heaven of earth is that much more remote.

Furthermore it is questionable whether, in her eagerness to employ the irrational and symbolic "to make a hold on the unreason in the human soul", she actually continues to concern herself with the truly irrational or the truly symbolic. The very effort to harness and control the irrational deprives it of the unpredictability and free-ranging expression which is of its essence. In Mitchison's early Christians, there is little of the subtle exchange of control and release which characterises the relationship between the conscious and the irrational self in The Corn King. This curtailment is mirrored in the novel's treatment of symbolism; rituals and symbols are not permitted to carry any intrinsic reference but are allocated a specific moral and psychological value, rendering them more akin to the signs of a moral allegory than to the symbols of a myth.

Before leaving this discussion of symbolism in Mitchison's two "thirties" novels it is of interest to quote her own retrospective summary of what she was trying to achieve, written in the nineteen forties when the psychological philosophy of Jung was consciously shaping her thought.

Jung also speaks constantly of the general impoverishment of symbolism, which lays mankind open to 'perils of the soul', not only the too direct prophetic vision which may shatter the soul but also the danger of other symbols and myths invading the helpless victim, a state of things too plain in modern Germany Now we cannot just clean up and re-use symbols or myths which are still in general use but have lost their potency and interest, though this is a mistake which is often made. We have to have mythologies which will be potent and protecting for our own era. I have already written about this in The Moral Basis of Politics and I have tried to use a new set of symbols in fiction in We Have Been Warned. But I have thought about the symbols not merely as protection for the individual, but also as social glue, doubtless another aspect of the same thing.

'Of course when I say they are a new set, none of them are really new; they are only symbols which have disappeared long enough for humanity to have changed in relation to them and for them to be described freshly. This way they become again potent 1

This is a fair commentary on Mitchison's overall intentions although their extra-literary premises beg questions for the literary critic. In addition, as I have tried to show, her investigations of symbolism, particularly in We Have Been Warned, are experiments rather than a finished achievement. Mitchison also underestimates the extent to which she modified her characteristic attitude towards the irrational or the unconscious in the direction of a moral and political response to the menace of fascism. The use of symbols as "social glue" may be "an aspect of the same thing" but its results in Blood of the Martyrs are significantly dissimilar.

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) pp.515-516.

The main interest of We Have Been Warned, and a nexus of literary critical problems, centres around the interaction of Mitchison's imaginative forms or motifs - the quest, initiation, the male and female "archetypes", the king who dies for his people and the Kingdom of Heaven - with the pressure of contemporary circumstances. The novel gives the impression of having been over hastily written: much of the dialogue is weak and many of the passages written from Dione's viewpoint are marred by a colloquial idiom reminiscent of a gushy woman on the telephone. Cape's reader, Edward Garnett, who saw the novel in typescript, wrote of,

".... loose superfluous stuff. The author's pen seems to run on, putting down all that occurs to her and there's an over-fluency about many other passages that makes them inartistic and very often tiring. 1

The stylistic problem relates to the wider charge of undigested realism, of a naive transfer of real life into the novel form. The structure of the book alters as the European political climate changes, and it is extensively autobiographical both in point of detail and theme. The dilemma of being a member of the upper classes and believing in the socialist millenium was Mitchison's own in the nineteen thirties.

"But did we believe that a socialist society would mean a complete destruction of our kind of life, as clearly a revolution with any reality ought to have done? Not really. That kind of belief is very, very difficult to hold for more than a few minutes, especially if you have children: hostages. We would certainly have agreed that change was necessary, was admirable, but we went on planning for things to go on as they were going. 2

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1. Unpublished letter from Edward Garnett to Naomi Mitchison, quoted in Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.173.
 2. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.192.

In the same memoir of the twenties and thirties, Mitchison describes a lifestyle which is that of Dione and Phoebe in the novel.

... we filled up all that lovely spare time which nobody seems to have today with our friends and children, ours and our friends' love affairs, our good causes and committees, Dick's Bar work, my writing, interest in the other arts, letters, trips abroad, and as time went on the growth of social conscience. This last didn't go as far as doing without Lev, nurse, cook, housemaid and the rest, which would of course also have meant giving up our home, dependent as it was on them. But at least we found ourselves living into a frame of mind where the class structure began to look very unreal. 1

At the same time there was a steadily increasing "background of fear" at the thought of what the next war might be like."² The atmosphere which Mitchison describes is well caught in this prose poem of John Lehmann; a woman sits in the garden of a country house but cannot exclude the threat of the public world from her private existence.

The voices of her children, that come to her from the upper rooms of the house, bring her anxiety into sharper focus. She sees obscurely a future that will deny the values which her life, her well-filled house and quiet garden are teaching them. She hears the angry noise of history grow louder, like the noise of a landslide on an island coast. 3

Other features of We Have Been Warned such as the ambivalence

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1. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.28
 2. Ibid., p.192.
 3. John Lehmann The Noise of History (London, 1934) p.44.

with which the British Communist Party is viewed¹ and the feminist interest,² are taken directly from life. The new independence of women in the post-war years, and the changes brought about in marital and extra-marital relationships by the developments in contraception were important in Mitchison's life and thinking during this period. Each of the places around which the novel is built are thinly disguised versions of places Mitchison lived in or knew well. Aucharnish is Cloan, the family house at Auchterarder which Mitchison describes in her two earlier autobiographical volumes;³ Oxford is the environment of Mitchison's childhood and youth, and although her husband was not a don her father and brother were. The aspect of London depicted in the novel is the Bohemian artistic and party-going milieu in which Mitchison lived with her husband, while Marshbrook Bridge is the Birmingham (alias Sallington) constituency for which he stood as Labour candidate in 1931 and again in 1935. The Russia of We Have Been Warned is the Russia of Mitchison's Fabian Society trip to the U.S.S.R. in 1932, and incidents such as the abortion which Mitchison witnessed there are transferred from the one context to the other.

Fictional characters too are drawn from real-life originals. Dione is Mitchison herself in her roles of mother, wife and political

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1. See Naomi Mitchison "To Some Young Communists from an Old Socialist", New Verse (London, 1933) Vol.I No.1 p.9.
 2. During the thirties Mitchison planned a book on feminism, the notes for which are held in the National Library of Scotland Accession 6120.
 3. Naomi Mitchison Small Talk (London, 1973) and Naomi Mitchison All Change Here (London, 1975).

activist, while Phoebe is a projection of her artistic self switched from the craft of literature to the visual arts practised by her close friends, Gertrude Hermes and Agnes Miller Parker. The hard-working, sensible and politically committed Tom is Mitchison's husband as is Phoebe's husband Robin whose war-time legacy of depression and nightmare is another aspect of Dick Mitchison in the post-war years. Alex, Dione's brother, is modelled on J.B.S. Haldane; Muriel, the type of the professional socially concerned woman, suggests Mitchison's aunt Elizabeth Haldane. The characters in Mitchison's books are often either autobiographical or drawn from real life¹ (Berris in The Corn King also owes something to J.B.S. Haldane), but normally they are transmuted by being placed in a different historical and social milieu.

The directly empirical element in We Have Been Warned arises more from the author's subject matter rather than from her treatment of it, but it is also related to a professed democratic or socialist realism. In a later discussion of language in fiction, Mitchison touches on the topic of writing which conveys a sense of the contemporary period.

I think one may go as far as to suggest that most of the serious - the significant talk - is about social relationships which are in a state of change. When such relationships are altered or broken it is not accidental, but part of a series of events to which writers should be attending and out of which they should be fashioning the continuous garb of significant stories or mythology, with which they must clothe naked historical action.' 2

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1. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) pp.166-167.
 2. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.456.

Social relationships in the England of the nineteen thirties were changing and nowhere more significantly than in the emergence of the working class as a focus of interest, and indeed of power - of potential for the alteration of society. This is reflected in the attention which Mitchison devotes to the working people of Sallington. Their personalities, their views, their social and material circumstances, their way of life, have, it is implied, a right to appear in a work of fiction, and not simply as a backdrop for the drama of the principal characters. What they do and think is of significance for society as a whole and therefore, in theory, for the overall structure of the novel; Dione's growing involvement in the constituency is an analogue for the interest which the writer ought to be taking in this developing area of society.

Mitchison's democratic literary practice is comparable to that of her brother, J.B.S.Haldane, who was engaged at the same time, through among other things the columns of The Daily Worker, in the popularisation and democratisation of scientific knowledge. At one juncture Mitchison went so far as to inaugurate a project of collective authorship which foundered when Dick Mitchison moved to a winnable constituency.

After a few years of King's Norton, I started to write a book: "Kitch against Caroline", in which I used conversations, including phone calls, for complete chapters: old hat now. I also had a working committee which was to keep me right on detail and help with the probabilities of the story. We had some fascinating meetings. In my novel, Kitch (short for Kitchener) was a draughtsman. I got the class and skill differences rather well sorted out and my committee were keen and vocal and often usefully critical. 1

1. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.187. Fragments of the novel and notes from the meetings are preserved in the uncatalogued Mitchison collection in the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

The problem about this project was that the fashioning of "the continuous garb of significant stories" tended to give way to the recordings of "naked historical action". Similarly much of the realism in the Sallington portions of We Have Been Warned is journalistic rather than fictional, and extended at the expense of the novel's structure. Intrinsically interesting as the lives of the Taylors or the Groves may be, and Mitchison's concern for them is apparent, she fails to bring them into other than an incidental relationship with the lives of the principal characters. It is the collective idea of the people of Marshbrook Bridge as a class or group which is crucial to Dione's mental conflicts, despite her good intentions to be useful and involved on a personal level.

Mitchison's determination to adhere to social reality brought her into conflict with her publishers, Jonathan Cape, who refused to publish the novel without substantial cuts. Cape's objections centred on descriptions of physical passion which were considered to go beyond contemporary standards of decency, and on the frequent mention of contraceptives.¹ Mitchison conducted the argument on the lines of a dispute between censorship and artistic freedom, but Edward Garnett was also unhappy about We Have Been Warned on literary grounds. The treatment of sex and contraception is an integral part of the novel's empirical emphasis and is open to the same charge of an over-direct transfer from life to art. The main effect of the

1. The full correspondence is held in the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas, in an uncatalogued collection. See also Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) pp.171-181, where Mitchison uses the letters to illustrate contemporary attitudes.

wrangle was to delay the publication of the novel from 1933 to 1935,¹ thus interrupting the unbroken succession of novels on which Mitchison had worked since 'The Conquered' (1923).

Mitchison's concern with contraception in 'We Have Been Warned' is as much sociological as libertarian, and forms part of a steady flow of information about health care, sex, housing, and even eating and drinking habits.

Odd, she thought, about drugs. Even they are a class thing. Tannin for the workers and everyone in the North: caffeine for the upper and professional classes, especially in London: alcohol transcends class boundaries, but is seldom used much by working-class women and seldomer still by middle-class women or the older professional and upper-class women: nicotine ... aspirin

('We Have Been Warned' p.89)

In the mid-thirties, Mitchison began a book about slum life in the British cities which was to be composed of description and snatches of conversation with people caught in the urban nightmare.

'In one of my diaries I have noted a few remarks from the people I talked to (with details of their rent), for instance: 'Don't know when it was, the last time I had a bath, couldn't tell you in God's truth.' 'It's wicked, it is, makes you feel sick it does' - the smell of bugs. Or just this from a woman, 'Never go out nowhere' and from another, 'No pleasure'. 2

This "sociological" book was to be called 'Mother England' and although the project remained inchoate, the attitudes behind it led naturally

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1. The novel passed through the hands of several publishers before being published in emended form by Constable in 1935.
 2. Naomi Mitchison 'You May Well Ask' (London, 1979) p.171.

to Mitchison's involvement in the unique "thirties" phenomenon of "Mass Observation".

"Mass Observation" was founded formally in 1937 by an Oxford anthropologist, Tom Harrison, the documentary film maker, Humphrey Jennings, and the poet, Charles Madge; and the uniqueness of its approach to social investigation is well illustrated by the diversity of its founders. Its brand of realism consisted in the painstaking recording of the every day habits and circumstances of life in the uncharted tracts of English social life. The model for such "scientific study of human social behaviour"¹ was anthropology which, under the influence of Malinowski, had switched its emphasis from sweeping comparative studies to intensive fieldwork among a particular tribe or people. The description, for example, of Dione's visit to the Groves' house after Mrs. Grove's death, is more an account of the mourning rites in this stratum of the working-class than a revelation of Dione's grief. The flowers and the value placed upon them are described; Mrs. Groves is "laid out" in the back room and Dione is invited to see her; and the reactions of employers, workmates and relations are cited as necessary elements of the grieving process. Dione's main emotion is that of unease because she is an outsider and therefore unable to relate her reactions to the manner in which she is expected to express sympathy.

The poetic or subjective element in the "Mass Observation"

1. These remarks are based on the movement's first manifesto, Mass Observation (1937), a pamphlet written by Harrison and Madge, and on May the Twelfth (London, 1937), a Mass Observation study of George VI's coronation.

programme is apparent in their concentration on the impact throughout society of certain nationally significant events, such as the abdication of Edward VII, the coronation of George VI, and the fire which destroyed the Crystal Palace in 1936. "What might it signify", Harrison and Madge wondered in their manifesto, "to the British collective imagination and what psychological and political resonances would such an apocalyptic image have?". The aim was to register popular feeling and thus to "give the masses a voice". The "voice" however was not to be chosen by the masses themselves, nor intriguingly did it involve any of the long-established means of working-class expression such as folk-songs or popular art. Instead the artists and intellectuals who were the moving spirits of "Mass Observation" sought to develop what Madge described as a "symbiology of the mass-unconscious".

The "Mass Observation" mentality sheds considerable light on Mitchison's attempt to see the English society of the nineteen thirties in terms of the group categories which, under the influence of anthropology, she had perceived in ancient history. Nonetheless the enterprise fails because it demands an unacceptable mixture of modes of realism: individual psychological realism with a poetic generalisation of moral and psychological qualities of character more appropriate to Romance. Dione, as observer and commentator, constitutes the principal source of point of view in the novel, and thus a yardstick of what is acceptable as real within the fictional heterocosm. Consequently the Romance strand must either be viewed through the filter of individual realism, and as a result fatally weakened, or hived off from the main body of the work, depriving it

in the process of any overall unity.

Dione's emotional attitude towards English middle-class society is an example of the former alternative.

She set herself to watch the Sallingtonians dining. They seemed to do it very thoroughly. She stated them to herself. They were proud; they were ugly; they didn't know they were ugly; they moved badly; they talked about money; they wanted to have things - a step from that, they would be horrible to be made love to by - they wouldn't wait, they'd snatch and grab - yes, grab and be sick afterwards like greedy children. That was it, they weren't adult, not an adult class

(We Have Been Warned p.54)

This series of assertions is entirely unsupported by any description of what it claims to categorise: it derives as much from Dione's imagination as from what she is perceiving. There is a total dislocation between the way in which the reader views Dione and the way in which Dione views the Sallington middle-classes. What Dione identifies and tries to characterise is a moral or psychological quality but there is no evidence to support her interpretation.

Mitchison seems to acknowledge this when, already writing from within Dione's point of view, she further distances herself from her character's musings with the phrase, "She stated them to herself".

In this instance there is a clear separation between Dione's viewpoint and that of the author, and the distinction is reinforced by Mitchison's critique of Dione's "anthropological" imagination. However, in the Russian narrative, there is no such demarcation and the authorial viewpoint wavers as much as Dione's attitude to the

U.S.S.R. Dione transfers her ideal of socialist right relationship, of co-operation, sexual freedom and happiness, to the actual society and people which she encounters. The manifest defects of this society are acknowledged but in a perfunctory, sociological manner; the whole emotional tenor is in another direction, and it is no coincidence that Dione's moods of empiricism coincide with periods of emotional exhaustion. This projection is most evident in Mitchison's treatment of the sexual relations between Dione and Donald, and Tom and Oksana, passages which Garnett considered to be marred by "acute emotional sentimentality".¹ These relationships belong to a realm of freedom and brotherhood in which sexual love is given and taken as an open gift of friendliness and common humanity, but Dione, the principal participant, belongs to the middle-class world of embarrassment and hurt. The relationship of Tom and Oksana, in particular, is pure pastoral, and could have been lifted from the pages of Morris' News from Nowhere.

Dione has previously been established as a character "in the round", set in the milieu of English society, and she remains the novel's cipher of reality. Her effort to override this personality in favour of the liberated socialist woman, whom she believes appropriate to the nascent "Kingdom of Heaven", is entirely unconvincing and as Garnett says embarrassing to read. If this embarrassment were intended one might be consoled but there is no evidence that it is. Mitchison persists in seeing the Russian trip as a rebirth into another

1. Naomi Mitchison You May Well Ask (London, 1979) p.173.

mode of existence and in later criticising it as a delusion, without finally reconciling the two attitudes. The ambivalence evident in Mitchison's own Russia Diary has spilled over not only into the content of the novel but into its structure. One can only conclude that Mitchison was writing too close to experience and allowing the fictional world to be altered directly by the flux of the moment.

The same accusation can be levelled against the ending of We Have Been Warned. Mitchison comments in 'Russia Diary',

I have an idea for how my modern book is going on, but had hoped to see its end, its solution here, and I don't. It's not going to be so easy for me as that. One does so want a solution, a happy ending, an at-one-ment a healing; but for me it is not here and I begin to think I shall never get it. One was born too soon. One will have to go on struggling and puzzling and being damned uncomfortable, for the sake of the future, and one will never get what one wants, never get back to Marob. 1

With the return to Marob at the end of The Corn King and the Spring Queen, Mitchison inclines towards such a comic atonement of healing, at the expense of the internal logic of the novel. The case of We Have Been Warned is the reverse one: the novel promises a happy ending for Dione with the birth of her new child but an unhappy ending is imposed on the inherent development of the work. The cause of this change of direction is the Reichstag fire and its consequences which reverberate apocalyptically through the ending of the novel like the Crystal Palace fire in the popular imagination, and like the great fire of Rome in Blood of the Martyrs.

1. Naomi Mitchison 'Russia Diary' pp.145-146.

The ending of We Have Been Warned belongs, like the Russian episode, to the Romance mode, although, unlike the Russian sequence, it is separated from the rest of the novel by the acknowledgement that it is a vision. A foretaste of the future, in the form of a dream, is granted to Dione by the ghost of Green Jean, the witch-ancestor of Dione and Phoebe with whom they identify in their struggle against the Campbell Women. The device of the dream vision mitigates the disparity between the Dione of the novel as a whole and the Dione of the vision whose family life is brutally broken up around her, but does little to enhance the credibility of the prophecy or warning. Although Mitchison is tapping a collective psychic type, namely the fear of an imminent catastrophe or judgement engulfing civilisation, which was rapidly coming to replace the hope of a socialist millenium in the imagination of the thirties, her realisation of this theme concentrates more on Dione's personal anxieties. It is the destruction of her individual emotional security which looms large: her home is looted, her daughter raped, her son imprisoned and her husband executed. Even the detested Coke-Brown relations reappear as fascist para-militaries.

The key-note is the same of over-dramatisation and emotional falsity which intrudes whenever Mitchison attempts to imagine Dione out of her social ambit. Because the novel is grounded on a realistic portrayal of the liberal individualism which Mitchison knew so well from her own experience, the Romance elements appear by contrast febrile and closer to wish-fulfillment fantasies of adventure and danger than to the psychological verisimilitude intended. This lack of a middle-term to unite and harmonise the realistic character portrayal

with the imaginative form leaves the structure of the novel in a disarray, which is compounded by the presence of substantial portions of journalistic empiricism that relate neither to the Romance or the realistic strands.

The question which remains to be answered is why the evocation of a level of experience beyond that of the individual self, which is a failure in 'We Have Been Warned' succeeds in Blood of the Martyrs, especially since the Romance forms concerned (initiation, the search for the Kingdom or the Good, group loyalty, self-sacrificial death and rebirth) are exactly the same. The answer lies in the style and mode of the respective novels. Blood of the Martyrs is unified by a single, flexible register, while the earlier novel switches from Dione's colloquial flow to Phoebe's stream of consciousness, to factual record, to an emotive adventure narrative, and back to Dione. The single style of the later novel is lucid, and accurate, close to everyday reality, near-colloquial but economical in description and adaptable to the viewpoint of many different characters without disjunction. Above all the tone of the prose can be adjusted to represent collective emotion by a heightening of the same register, thus obviating the necessity for clumsy devices like Green Jean's ghost. This technique, which is employed throughout in order to evoke the communality of the Church, is encapsulated in the following passage about Cleopatra-Isis.

The priestess told them all about Cleopatra one day, talking quietly to a dozen little tarts who sat on the steps of the shrine in the spring sunshine, eating raisins and sometimes exclaiming or crying a little, for they laughed and cried easily.

Cleopatra was a great Queen; she was Queen of Egypt and the East; she led her own ships and men into battle; she was wiser at statecraft than any man. She was too great a queen ever to love, but she had sons by the men who loved her, who were to rule all over the world. For, although she had no mercy on the rich or the strong, yet always she was compassionate as Isis herself, to the people. And so it was, in the end, that she had Rome against her, Rome which means naked power, Rome with the sword and the whip. She fought Rome for the thing which we all want, for the golden age of peace and joy and compassion, when the common people shall at last be free. But Cleopatra was beaten by the Romans, as your fathers were, Salome, and yours, Iotape, and yours, Gwinedda, and yours, Lalage. And Octavian Caesar whom the Romans call Augustus, he killed her sons who were to have taken her golden age across the whole world. And she was to have walked shamefully through Rome in Caesar's triumph, but in the end she escaped him. For Re the sun himself, sent his messenger to Cleopatra: the asp who rears his head, which is death, from the crown of Egypt. And the asp took her and made her into a goddess, into her in whose image she had lived, as Queen. So, because she suffered all, she is kind to all and welcomes all, but mostly women who are hurt and lonely, and mothers whose sons have died or been taken from them. And because she was a great Queen she does not ask for offerings; she is not a taker, but a giver.

'The girls on the steps sighed and wriggled and wondered what it was like to be a great queen.'

('Blood of the Martyrs' pp.100-101)

The transition into and out of the more heightened mode is marked by a deliberately colloquial note: the girls are "eating raisins" in the spring sunshine and, released from the spell of the narrative, they "sighed and wriggled". The priestess tells the story but the viewpoint of the narrative belongs collectively to all the girls, a fact indicated by the way in which the old crone gathers her listeners into the tale "as your fathers were, Salome, and yours".

It is significant that this raising of the narrative pitch occurs in the context of an oral narrative, but the linguistic devices used to achieve it apply also to descriptive passages in which a collective viewpoint is employed. The rhythm becomes tighter with an increase in the proportion of stressed syllables, and an underlying suggestion of poetic regularity, centred around the short three or four-stressed phrase. Special effects are gained by the interruption of this regularity with a short phrase ("to the people"); a longer phrase ("he killed her sons who were to have taken her golden age across the whole world"); or by the two in conjunction: "And because she was a great Queen she does not ask for offerings; she is not a taker, but a giver." The common rhetorical figures of repetition and variation are also used.

And so it was, in the end, she had Rome against her, Rome which means naked power, Rome with the sword and the whip.

(Blood of the Martyrs p.100)

The sudden metric regularity of the last phrase provides the variation and therefore emphasis. Euphony and cacophony are also at work since the harshness of "Rome with the sword and the whip" contrasts with "the golden age of peace and joy".

The passage begins with the historical aspect of Cleopatra who is "wiser at statecraft than any man", using the mythological reference ("as compassionate as Isis") merely as a comparison; but as the narrative develops the mythological aspect becomes more prominent, and the gods become actors on the stage of the story: "For Re the Sun himself, sent his messenger to Cleopatra". Thus a new psychological nuance is introduced, and a further heightening of tone that evokes a

sense of participation in the universal drama of life and death as well as of common female sympathy, and paves the way for Cleopatra's own divinisation as Isis. Yet the human aspect of the goddess is emphasised again at the close since that is what binds her to her listeners. In short, through a skilful manipulation of language, Mitchison creates the emotional tone with which she equates her idea of a collective dimension to the psyche, that lies below the level of ordinary consciousness and is governed by archetypical patterns. Authorial intention, character, point of view and style are all agreed.

Are such a style and the approach which it implies more appropriate to a historical than a contemporary novel? Certainly the historical novel can be receptive towards the Romance type of fiction and suitable, through its freedom from the detailed empirical tests to which contemporary fiction is liable, for a presentation of the enduring in human nature; the reader brings a different set of expectations of "the real" to the historical form. Furthermore there are especial dangers in bringing sweeping moral judgements to bear on present events, as Mitchison herself indicates in this passing thought of Dione in Moscow.

Lenin. He was undoubtedly the greatest single figure in modern history. The greatest events of modern history happened here and hereabouts. What was I doing all that time? For certainly I didn't realise what was happening. Very few of us did I was thinking of Tom being back safe from the war and Morag a darling baby. Oh yes, and Ireland. I was all in a fuss about the Black and Tans, when all this was going on. Odd how one misses the 'bus'.

('We Have Been Warned' p.248)

However these arguments depend on what kind of historical novel 'Blood of the Martyrs' is. Although there is a historical casing of facts, circumstances and setting, the moral and psychological realism which is the substance of the novel is as much present as past. The forces which motivate the characters and shape Mitchison's social portrait are attitudes and qualities of mind that unite, in her view, the period setting of the novel and the contemporary world. There is therefore none of the interest in the specificity of history considered appropriate to 'the historical novel proper'.¹ The lines of Mitchison's character portrayal are drawn either from a rationalist, neo-classical and essentially comic view of the typical aspects of human nature, which encompasses the minor characters, or from a blend of Idealism and Romanticism.

Mitchison's Romanticism is displayed in the conflicts of her principal figures which depend, not on the movement of social classes and historical forces, but on her own awareness of self and its appeal, through emotive and sensuous language, to the awareness of the reader. This enterprise is justified, in Mitchison's outlook, by her Idealism which holds the forms and forces that the artist discovers within herself to be also those which motivate and influence the rest of humanity - a belief which led inevitably to the philosophy of Jung and his recreation of Platonic Ideas in the guise of psychic archetypes.

1. I take the difference between "the historical novel proper" and the historical romance to be "the derivation of the individuality of character from the historical peculiarity of their age" or, in a less historicist form, "the tendency to look at history through character and at character through the history that had worked on it". See respectively Georg Lukacs 'The Historical Novel', translated Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London, 1962) p.19, and David Daiches "Scott's Achievement as a Novelist" in 'Literary Essays' (Edinburgh, 1956) p.119.

On the other hand to classify Mitchison as a pure Romancer whose use of history is a mere matter of costume and setting would be to oversimplify. The plausible surface, created through a combination of historical setting and everyday characters, is important to the novel's credibility, and so for the suspension of disbelief which is a prerequisite of the reader's involvement in the reality of the total fictional heterocosm. For Mitchison herself the historical setting provides an element of intellectual discipline necessary to the construction of the work as a whole, since it qualifies the typical and archetypal aspects, mediating them in an indirect and more effective way. Archetypes or gods do not become characters in the novel as they would be in a myth. This is an essential distinction because mythic forces or personifications require their own narrative structure and demand of the reader their own peculiar suspension of disbelief. In The Corn King Mitchison weakens the novel by neglecting this distinction, but Blood of the Martyrs supplies its own content for the "mythic" forms at every stage.

The historical element, then, in Mitchison's fiction disciplines the psychological Romance and restrains her inclination towards an unmediated use of mythic or fantastic materials. The effect of this is not to weaken the imaginative penetration of the work but to reinforce it by cohering the facets of her vision within a single complex but unified construct. The discipline involved is one of detail, of the philosophical awareness called for in the building of a house of fiction, and of a necessary distance between the author and her material. This last point is especially true of a writer whose principal materials lie within her own psyche, and its applicability

to Mitchison can be quickly demonstrated by the comparison between We Have Been Warned and Blood of the Martyrs. The two novels deal with similar experiences but Mitchison's encounter with the human extremes demands the distance of the historical garb. At a later stage in her career, Mitchison was to experiment with other, more contemporary settings for her fiction which were yet distant from her own experience, thus challenging her categorisation as either historical novelist or historical romancer.

A fine example of Mitchison's Romance method, which includes a disciplined use of the empirical material with which she is working, is the Games scene in Blood of the Martyrs. The viewpoint of the prose moves from the mob, to Tigellinus, to Crispus and Balbus, to the Christians; and each move introduces to this climactic scene one of the types of moral outlook represented in the novel. Foremost amongst these is the false consciousness of the Roman people with their thirst for blood, sacrifice and spectacle, now brought into direct confrontation with the Church's moral interpretation of reality. It is a life-and-death clash between the powers of the world and the Kingdom of Heaven, in which the Kingdom is both the victim and the moral victor. The strength of the passage is the descriptive medium which sustains the thematic contrasts such as that between the true and the false kinds of sacrifice - the bloody fate of the Christians and their inner, moral resolve to die. Through an accessible conception of common humanity, a grasp of detail and an appeal to sense experience, Mitchison recreates the Roman Games. The recreation may not be true to the experience of the ancient Romans but it is experientially credible, and its credibility is intrinsically

conditioned by the period setting.

You'd have woke up that morning thinking it's the Games again, and you might have been dreaming about them, hot, tangled kinds of dreams, mostly, and the dream would go on getting at you while you combed your hair and cut your lump of bread that was to have a bit of dried fish or ham for a relish, unless it was a free lunch day with drinks on the Emperor, and the dream would go on as you walked there through the early morning with a snap of September chill in it already, but it would warm up, oh yes, and you'd hurry rather quietly tasting the dream still, and you'd get near and begin to hear the noises, the crashing of, the sudden shrill, the quickening wanting noises of. And you'd elbow in, stamping on toes and swearing, to read the notices, red and black lettering of a whole new day of the Games for you citizens, you because Rome because you. Out of the pairs of the first act of gladiators, fifty percent kills guaranteed, no fumbling or cheating: river scene with Leda and troupe of trained swans: female prisoners thrown in snake pit: blacks hunt ostriches, tigers hunt blacks: attack on castle, flame throwers in galloping chariots: whole circus filled with dancers, nude dancers, armoured dancers, feathered dancers, eighty nude dancers raffled among audience: display of jumping lucky piebald horses with flags: simultaneous net and trident or sword and club fights: genuine Alexandrian brothels, personnel specially imported, Egyptian background by experts, living Sphynx and crocodiles: the great clean-up, Christians eaten by bears, lions, hyaenas and wolves, the Emperor lends animals from his private menagerie: Greek torch race: acrobats and elephants: illuminated tight-rope walk across the Circus: grand firework finale.

(Blood of the Martyrs pp.437-438)

In retrospect, the most distinctive feature of Mitchison's work in the nineteen thirties is the way in which she sustained her characteristic interests and methods while simultaneously responding closely to the literary and social trends of the period. In the nineteen twenties too she had been abreast of literary and intellectual movements, producing in The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931) a monumental work based on what were then understood to be the structures

of myth; yet the similarities between The Corn King and the "thirties" novels are more striking than the differences. Mitchison's capacity to assimilate and adapt to a cultural environment while retaining her distinct literary identity is a phenomenon deserving of closer attention.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BULL CALVES - I

Despite the concentration of her creative energies on ancient historical territories and her entry into the intellectual, literary and political life of London, Mitchison maintained an interest in her Scottish, Haldane background and in cultural developments north of the border. She championed Hugh MacDiarmid at a time when he had more critics than admirers,¹ read Neil Gunn's novels and corresponded with Leslie Mitchell, the author of the "Sunset Song" trilogy. The Scottish Renaissance in which these three men were leading figures plays a part, although a subordinate one, in Mitchison's contemporary novel, We Have Been Warned (1935).

Phoebe Bathurst, the embodiment in the novel of Mitchison's artistic persons, has a meditative poetic vision of Scotland.

"And the salt water goes on past Eileann Dubh and the ruined house, till it becomes strange and ruffled and fierce with tides and currents tugging in and out among the islands, thickening and strengthening the stems of the kelp. The currents and the tides enclose and net the islands, swinging and hurrying for ever under the Paps of Jura, under the steepes of Islay, twisting out beyond Colonsay and Oronsay and the Outer Islands, forced in saw-toothed fierce tide-ripples through the Sounds and south along Kintyre, places of deer and birds, tiny bays with one or two fishing boats and maybe a cow licking up the salty grass and a wee ragged lad playing with sticks at the tide edge. 2

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1. See C.M.Grieve "Lucky Poet" (London, 1943) pp.232-233 and unpublished letters from C.M.Grieve to Naomi Mitchison, held in National Library of Scotland, Accession 5836.
 2. Naomi Mitchison "We Have Been Warned" (London, 1935) pp.13-14. Extracts from Phoebe's musings also appeared as "Interlude", The Modern Scot (St. Andrews, 1933) Vol.IV No.2 pp.100-104.

The description has a rhythmic beauty but it is a traveller's description, depending heavily on a visual, cinematographic appeal. The names are used like an incantation, evoking a beauty which attracts because it is only partially known and therefore mysterious like the sea. The phrase "places of deer and birds" is a piece of Gaelic English and part of a literary rather than an observed picture of the Highlands. Mitchison's "wee ragged lad" seems to have stepped straight from a William MacTaggart shorescape. It is the sea itself which catches the writer's imagination while the islands are treated in a language of conventional landscape which Phoebe the artist would herself despise.

Phoebe's vision of the Clyde and Glasgow possesses more contemporary edge.

.... and there between the hills is the Gare Loch, full of ships, the lowland ships, the Glasgow ships, the Greenock ships wedged into the Highlands. That is the meeting-place, the gathering-place. When I say Scotland I mean the Gare Loch, I mean the coming together of Highland and Lowland with sparking and flaring and building of great ships full of engines, propellers turning slowly and then faster and faster and faster. 1

Instead of the picturesque human being on the shore, there is a sense of urgency and vitality in the mingling of Highland and Lowland, the primitive past and the industrial present. The traditional imagery of Highland, tribal pride is harnessed to the energy of Glasgow to weld a new consciousness of national coherence. But in We Have Been Warned this promise is vitiated by the depression and the backward-

1. Naomi Mitchison We Have Been Warned (London, 1935) p.14.

looking fissiparity of Scottish culture; the novel moves away from Scotland, to England and the Labour Party.

Yet the idea of a regeneration for Scotland, urban and rural, had taken root in Mitchison's mind. In 1935 she stood as Labour candidate for the Scottish Universities parliamentary seat, and she continued, through The Modern Scot and other periodicals, to keep in touch with the cultural movement. In the early thirties it was Glasgow - horrific in its slum ugliness but the centre of a new stirring - which held her attention, just as she had turned increasingly to the English working-class as a source of vitality and renewal.

Somewhere up grim stairs,
 steep streets of fog-greased cobbles,
 In harsh, empty closes with only a dog or child sobbing,
 Somewhere among unrhythmic,
 shattering noises of tram-ways
 Or by cranes and dock-yards, steel clanging and slamming,
 Somewhere without colour, without beauty,
 without sunlight,
 Amongst this cautious people,
 some unhappy and some hungry,
 There is a thing being born as it was
 born once in Florence: 1

Even when Mitchison had become fully committed to the political, and cultural aims of the diverse renaissance movement, she retained a strong sense of the ugliness and barbarity of much of Scottish life.

Mitchison was also interested in the Scots language as a medium that might enable her to by-pass some of the restrictions of her

1. Naomi Mitchison "The Scottish Renaissance in Glasgow" in C.M.Grieve, (ed.) Living Scottish Poets (London, 1931) p.25.

English prose style, which she associated with her middle-class rationalist upbringing, and to forge a more direct and forceful expression of emotion. In her early verse collection The Laburnum Branch (1926), she includes a few imitations of traditional Scots song idiom, but the example of MacDiarmid and his contemporaries led her to experiment more seriously with Scots.

A gaed tae ma ain luve
 Wi's gun ower ma shouther bane;
 Gun weichtan ma reesaln steps
 Atween saund an stane.

'A gaed tae ma ain luve
 Atween clood an sun,
 Himsel at the saumon nets
 Waitan on his gun.

'Thocht A wad see ma luve
 Turn frae the sea,
 Frae his watch on the rievian seal,
 Turn him tae me.

'Thocht A wad see ma luve
 Turn wi' a sma stairt.
 Sea deep the sole rope rins
 An sea deep the hairt.

'A gaed tae ma ain luve
 But och he wasna there.
 Weichty a muckle gun,
 Arm an hairt sair,
 An a seal loup an abune
 Nets whaur the saumon were. 1

Although this poem achieves some of the economy and force of expression at which Mitchison was aiming, it is still tied to the Scots song tradition, particularly that of the love song, and fails to take full advantage of the expansion of the range and reference of Scots that MacDiarmid began with his early "metaphysical" lyrics.

1. A Gaed Tae Ma Ain Luve, unpublished poem of Naomi Mitchison.

It is not therefore surprising that Mitchison's use of Scots did not, at this juncture, extend to her prose, although a letter from Leslie Mitchell, written in 1933, suggests that she may have regretted the fact.

I'm glad that you liked C.H.¹, but there's no need to regret that you don't write Scots - a thankless job, with the little Jew-boys of the Sunday newspapers calling you unintelligible and the constipated (I'm sure he's constipated) little rat of the Glasgow Herald saying that you're just a bad mixture of Ian MacLaren and Douglas Brown - with unnecessary coarseness thrown in. I get angry and then giggle. I suppose it's synthetic stuff, though not consciously so, like C.M. Grieve's (though his is very good). 2

The Scots usage of MacDiarmid's poetry and of Mitchell's fiction were to be important influences on Mitchison when she came to write her major Scottish novel, The Bull Calves (1947).

What was the attraction of Scotland to Mitchison, the established historical novelist and left-wing intellectual? One factor was certainly the stimulus of encountering a culture different from that of her own Oxford background, and the challenge of assimilating that culture's characteristic modes of thought and expression. In this respect what Scotland offered Mitchison the writer was similar to what she had discovered in ancient cultures and in English working-class society. In all three cases, she perceived, embodied in distinctive language and social organisation, a set of values antithetical to those of European, liberal, middle-class and

1. Lewis Grassie Gibbon Cloud Howe (London, 1933).

2. Unpublished letter from Leslie Mitchell to Naomi Mitchison, dated 10th August, 1933.

individualistic culture, which had led directly to the First World War. The cause of Scottish Nationalism provided a group loyalty or "mythology" which could be posed against the dominant economic and social trends.

Scotland, however, had the further advantage of being at one and the same time a traditional and a contemporary society. In the Highland stream of Scottish life, Mitchison discovered a culture which preserved, albeit in diminished form, a way of life in which work was tied closely to nature, and in which the community was united and not divided by its means of livelihood. Economically backward, the Highlands could yet boast a rich cultural heritage, stemming recognisably from ancient Celtic civilisation. The Scottish Lowlands, on the other hand, enshrined both the values and the defects of Western European "progress" - its rationality and moral sense along with its blighting commercialism and individualism.

Of course Mitchison's relationship with Scotland was intrinsically more complex than with ancient or working-class culture since her parents were Scottish. In some regards she came to Scotland as an "insider", but the question of identity is not one of straightforward demarcations, and Mitchison herself claims kinship with Africa as well as Scotland. Moreover, Mitchison's loyalties to a local or national group are always qualified by her humanism, which demands a commitment to the well-being and development of humanity as a whole. For literary purposes, it is better simply to say that, because of her upbringing and family connections, Mitchison knew more and more directly about Scotland when she came to write of it than she did about

ancient or working-class society.

Finally history itself took a hand in bringing Mitchison the writer and Scotland together. As the older Haldanes died, Mitchison's links with Cloan gradually loosened, and she began to look around for a base in Scotland for holidays. The result was the purchase, in 1937, of Carradale House in Kintyre, which possessed among other advantages a fishing river. Resolved at first that she would not become entrammelled in local affairs as her aunt, Elizabeth Haldane, had been at Cloan, Mitchison became progressively more involved, until in 1939 her London house was taken over as a hospital and Carradale became home.

Simple as these events are on the surface, they were to become intensely significant for Naomi Mitchison as a person and as a writer. For one thing, the move coincided with the break-up in London of the literary and intellectual circle to which Mitchison had belonged. The departure, in particular, of Auden and Gerald Heard for America seemed to set the seal on Mitchison's disenchantment with the cerebral and rootless nature of their preoccupations. Above all, for perhaps the first time in her life, Mitchison was put under the kind of compulsion she had so often imagined her characters under. Like the Early Christians in Blood of the Martyrs, which she was writing at the time, she felt that the powers of this world had taken control, and that those who sought the good had no freedom of action other than to practise kindness, reconciliation and reconstruction in their own limited sphere, even under threat of death.

In the circumstances this emotive view was not unjustified. All Mitchison had worked and hoped for in the thirties had been frustrated; a tragedy of hate and persecution was beginning to unfold itself in Europe; and her children were now subject to the dangers of war-hostages to fortune. This might seem suffering enough but in 1939 Mitchison's last baby died shortly after a difficult birth. In a poem written in the following year, she sees this event as symbolic of the useless death and suffering which is welling up on all sides.

Roll up the map of Europe.
 The lights have gone out: the concentration camps
 are full: the men and women
 Who thought themselves safe have been betrayed to
 the vultures,
 To Himmler, Goering, Franco, to those whose faces
 Express Satanic possession. Paris is dead.
 Only the bones remain. Paris of the Commune
 Dead as the sailors at Oran. This winter we hope
 to starve
 France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Poland:
 Harvest of dead babies, disease, hatred: no sense.
 My breasts tingle and stab with milk that no one
 wants,
 Surplus as American wheat, surplus and senseless.
 Not her soft kind mouth groping for me. Useless,
 senseless.
 If my baby had been starved by England, would I
 ever forgive?
 Roll up the map of Europe. 1

Although grounded in Scotland and her history, Mitchison's literary work during the next decade is also a deeply-felt response to the suffering of the Second World War.

Whatever the circumstances, Mitchison's fresh encounter with Scotland became almost immediately a major stimulus to literary endeavour, the first-fruits of which were her long descriptive poem

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.13.

"The Alban Goes Out: 1939". The notebook manuscript of this poem shows that it was written rapidly in creative bursts but that it was also subject to considerable revision and emendation.¹ Accordingly the finished version contains, in the account of one night's fishing, a rich diversity of rhythmic and linguistic device - an exuberance which exhibits all Mitchison's resource as a writer. The following passage, for instance, employs the familiar Mitchison devices of rhyme, rhythm and onomatopoeia to capture the physical tempo of the fishermen's work.

Men and engines grunting and hauling,
The nets dripping, the folds falling
As we thrash at the net the dead fish falling
Gleam and break from the tight mesh mauling,
Show what we'll get from the bag of the net!
And fierce and straining and shoulders paining
We drag it out from the sea's wild sprawling,
From the lit wet hummocks' twist and spin;
As the leaded sole-rope comes slumping in. 2

There is a straining after empirical accuracy in these lines almost beyond what the poetry can sustain (the terminological accuracy of "back-rope" is also characteristic), but Mitchison can equally achieve her effects with economy and aplomb.

Fine fat herring, good to be seen,
Blue and pink and silver and green,
Tinsel bellies and strong backs brown;
They flip like fleas as we shovel them down.
Easy to ask and hard to tell
In the dark of the hold is the herrings' hell. 3

Mitchison's evocation of landscape is, in both poetry and prose,

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1. The manuscript of "The Alban Goes Out: 1939" is held in an uncatalogued collection in the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.
 2. Naomi Mitchison The Cleansing of the Knife and other poems (Edinburgh, 1978) p.6.
 3. Ibid., p.7.

a consistent strength of her style, and these descriptions introduce a quieter, reflective note into the poem.

The moon rises over Arran, creating immediately
The diamond path, older than all ancient roads.
Small lights come out, so many in the one darkness:
The orderly lighthouses blink, up and down the coast,
And the Carradale fleet lights up. 1

The third line of this stanza replaces in the manuscript the far weaker version, "Moon stands along the horizon like a still aeroplane light." The finished stanza is a skilful poetic response to the low-lying Clyde coastline on a calm night with its succession of lighthouses.

Overall the poem alternates between observation and description of the fishermen and identification with them.

We are working all the season, boat near to
boat in the nights,
And danger may come on us quick, no time to
stand upon rights 2

Mitchison adopts at points not only the comprehensive "we" but the colloquial idioms and rhythms of Highland English, and the metre of popular songs or rhymes. This fluctuation of viewpoint conforms to no overall design, and in consequence the poem as a whole is more of an impressionistic medley than a resolved work of art. Nevertheless, it displays many of Mitchison's virtues as a writer of either verse or poetic prose, and shows her entering on a new phase of her artistic career at the full height of her linguistic powers. "The Alban" is a portent or foretaste of what is to follow, since even in its most descriptive sequences there is a shadow of symbolic heightening, a

1. Naomi Mitchison 'The Cleansing of the Knife and other poems' (Edinburgh, 1978) p.3.

2. Ibid., p.5.

subtle suggestion of correspondence between the objective physical world and the inner psychic one. This impression is hard to pinpoint in any particular line, but it is perhaps indicated by the manuscript's cryptic heading, "The Alban goes out. N.M. goes out with her."

The burst of creative activity heralded by "The Alban Goes Out" is not unlike that which succeeded Mitchison's "discovery" of ancient culture. In 1939, she completed "The Alban", wrote the first parts of the long poem sequence later published as "The Cleansing of the Knife", produced a long short story "Five Men and a Swan" and began another lengthy poetic project "Talking Oats".¹ In addition during this and following years, she became committed to local affairs and began to farm her own land, activities which had a literary spin-off in poems, songs and community dramas.²

However, just as Mitchison's early historical fiction is summed up in "The Corn King and the Spring Queen" (1931), so her Scottish writing finds its most comprehensive and significant expression in a major work of fiction, "The Bull Calves" of 1947. Of all Mitchison's long novels The Bull Calves comes closest to incorporating and balancing the diversity of her intellectual and imaginative interests. While avoiding the lapses in creative concentration which mar The Corn King and We Have Been Warned, it retains the complexity which

1. See Naomi Mitchison The Cleansing of the Knife and other poems (Edinburgh, 1978) pp.39-72, Naomi Mitchison Five Men and a Swan and Naomi Mitchison "Talking Oats", Chapman (Edinburgh, 1981) Vol.VI No.3-4, pp.10-20.
2. Mitchison also kept up her political interests with contributions to The Scots Independent, the socialist periodical Forward, and the manifestos of the "Scottish Convention" movement. She was active, too, in the committee planning for post-war reconstruction initiated by the Scottish Secretary of State, Tom Johnston.

she deliberately excluded from 'Blood of the Martyrs'.

The structure of the novel is a departure for Mitchison since, unlike her earlier works which are built around a Romance quest, 'The Bull Calves' centres on a dramatic situation - that of a house-party - and is confined to two days in time. It observes the Aristotelian unities and demands the kind of sustained, moment-by-moment realism with which Mitchison had been impatient in her previous fiction. In The Bull Calves she registers the subtle and complex interaction of human beings in a social, domestic or intimate setting, thus combining the realistic surface of human behaviour, as observed by the dramatic eye, with the psychological penetration which distinguishes the best of her prose fiction.

The Romance plot, characteristic of Mitchison's earlier fiction, is not abandoned in The Bull Calves but becomes the story behind the story. Distanced through memory and oral narration, the Romance tale gains in power, not just as a personal love story but as a fable embodying the psychological drama that underlies the domestic one. Although the love between Kirstie and Black William is the main subplot, and the only one treated wholly through oral narration, other stories are introduced, notably that of Patrick Haldane, filling in the background of each of the main characters. Since these subsidiary stories are not only psychologically but historically representative, the two-day drama at Gleneagles becomes an acting out in miniature of Scottish history (psychological, social, political and economic), making The Bull Calves not only Mitchison's most humanly three-dimensional novel but her most analytically constructed one.

The period setting of the drama is painstakingly and effectively realised. The food the characters eat, the clothes they wear, their topics of polite conversation and the dances they dance are accurate recreations of Scottish eighteenth-century, landed society. At points, such as when the post is opened at Gleneagles, the author's method becomes transparent, but Mitchison brings a relish to the process of reconstruction which saves it from becoming an academic exercise in social history.

... they went into supper - broth, roast goose
with beans and artichokes, side dishes of
cherries and whipped cream.

(The Bull Calves p.135)

Christy's were reliable, honest folk, would not get the Bearcrofts linen melled with any other. How did Kirstie herself manage? Did she send into Inverness? But Kirstie did her own bleaching, and encouraged her neighbours to use the bleach field at Borlum. Her fine linen was bleached the Dutch way, with buttermilk, forby the potashes and olive oil; some of her materials came from Holland but for one she would send to Danzig taking a three years' supply. Her coarser linen was bleached the Irish way.

(The Bull Calves p.137)

Mitchison's zest converts these passages into a poetry of material culture which is moreover channelled towards the overall task of recreating a household in all its aspects.

As Kirstie and Margaret Bearcroft's discussion on bleaching shows, the domestic detail extends naturally into the wider arena of economic and political history. The first part of the novel, "The Smooth Mid-Century", provides through the medium of Kirstie Haldane's life-story, an account of the history of Scotland from the end of the previous century until the rebellion of 1745. Kirstie's childhood

begins in the seventeenth century, in the tail-end of witchcraft and "that time of religious anger and intolerance" (The Bull Calves p.39). This atmosphere is reinforced by her marriage to the Calvinist zealot, Andrew Shaw, whose cruelty revives for Kirstie all the horrors she had first learnt at the knee of her superstitious nurse, Phemie Reid. At the same time Kirstie's role as minister's wife takes her to Paisley where she encounters the semi-industrialised weavers and witnesses the beginning of the linen thread industry. When Shaw moves to Ayr she sees something of the colliers' way of life, and the results, at one remove, of the enclosures in Galloway and Dumfriesshire.

Several different voices strive for utterance in Kirstie's narrative. Firstly and most strongly, there is the personal voice relating the story of a young girl's marriage, its failure, the birth-pangs of her true love, and the trials through which it is eventually brought to fruition. There is no doubt that the historical narrative is most compelling and effective when it coalesces with the personal voice, as it does in Kirstie's account of the Jacobite rising in 1715. To a girl in southern Perthshire at that time the war was an immediate reality, dividing her neighbours and possibly her own family, and bringing destruction in its wake.

'And then, in the later end of January, on the coldest night of the year, the MacDonalds and MacLeans and Camerons burnt the villages on the Stirling road. Aye, they burnt Auchterarder, Blackford, Dunning, Muthil and Aberuthven. They were saying it was to stop Argyll coming forward to take Perth. Maybe such things are a military necessity. But we were wakened out of our beds before it was light to sort up the house against the coming back of the men with the poor bodies who were homeless or hurt. Our father and

the boys were away down with what horses we had, and blankets, and their flasks full of brandy and whisky When we looked out into the dark we could see the nasty, red, wee glows here and there, a wicked, wavering light out of the moonless black, and bye and bye the tail of morning coming over the hills.

(The Bull Calves p.67)

The significance of this event is that it comes as no real surprise to the inhabitants of these villages on the fringe of the Highlands, where Gleneagles House is situated; it is a confirmation of an age-old fear and hate of the Highlanders, their reiving habits and essential savagery.

'.... the wild scared I was of these savages with their short, ragged kilts and the red, hairy legs they would have, and the black, greasy long tags of hair, for not many of them would have a decent wig or a tailor's coat, but only the plaids wrapped round them, and a fierce and fiercesome array of dirks and pistols, and the sgain dubh in the top of the stocking, that would do as well for a man's throat as a deer's. And, though I liked the pipes well enough, yet they could be a gey nasty, hellish laughing kind of sound, as though the men that blew them didna care the weight of a straw for life nor honour, neither their own nor another's.'

(The Bull Calves pp.55-56)

The Highland caterans are portrayed in the image of the Lowland devil, and this distrust and division is one of the things which must be overcome before Kirstie and Black William can find each other.

Much of the historical material included in Kirstie's narration concerns her view of society rather than the events of her own life. Her description of industrial development and of the lives of the weavers and colliers belongs to a second strand or voice - that of the "common folk of Scotland". Kirstie is, in Mitchison's phrase, "a

filter for the historical saga",¹ the communal story of Scotland's people who bear the brunt of the harsh struggle for existence.

But I have seen the colliers in Ayr and Lanark
and the saltpan workers along the Forth, so poor,
Catherine, that they couldna hardly be said to be
living at all. Aye, arled to their masters, slaves
with no hope of betterment. And I have seen the
free workers the same way, the Paisley weavers when
trade was bad and the fishermen when the fishings
were slack

(The Bull Calves p.54)

The historical perspective of this saga is that of Tom Johnston's "History of the Working Classes in Scotland" (1920), but Mitchison transforms Johnston's sober factual inditement into a conception of the "folk", oppressed but enduring through time. This is an extension of the idea of a racial stream of life which was influential in the anthropology of Mitchison's youth and is present in much of her work. Although a permanent feature of her own imaginative outlook, the conception of the folk, associated often with Herder, is influential in Scottish literature from Scott to MacDiarmid and Grassie Gibbon.

The same note is sounded in Mitchison's Scottish poetry of this period.

"Dark stand the centuries
Of ill days for the Highlands.
Tears in the glen, tears
For oppression of all kinds:
For the chief's targes and spears
As the stag goes by with the hinds,
And there's courage and song and laughter
And the plaids go swirling wide;
But the common man must hunt
For the blackshells in the sea-weed
Between a tide and a tide." 2

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1. The phrase occurs in a note on the manuscript of "The Bull Calves", held in an uncatalogued collection in the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.
 2. Naomi Mitchison "The Cleansing of the Knife and other poems" (Edinburgh, 1978) p.39.

Mitchison's appeal is that, since the experience of oppression and hardship is common to both Highlander and Lowlander, the two sides of Scotland should unite to create a better future.

Lay a close look on life,
 Watching what folk have needed
 And their descendents need.
 Peer back as Scott did once
 But clearer than ever he did,
 Seeing our folk in bond
 In a poor and a hard land,
 But slowly getting freed
 Through their own thought and sweat.
 If we can help this to happen
 Through times that are harder yet,
 Then we are Scots indeed. 1

This sense of Scotland transcends for Mitchison the division between the past and the present, and between the individual and the common will since, as she says in the same poem, we are "Ourselves in the stream of the dead/Pushed on ahead of them." A feeling for the past flows naturally into a commitment to the community of the present and the future.

The wavering between this communal viewpoint and the personal voice, which causes difficulties in Mitchison's long poems, is not a problem in the novel, since Kirstie speaks for the common people. The communal voice is presented as her conception of Scotland, and it lies at the root of her behaviour throughout The Bull Calves. In this she is clearly Mitchison's alter ego, but the discipline of constructing the period-based, fictional heterocosm provides the distance between Mitchison and her creation which is necessary to her as a writer, and which makes of Kirstie a satisfying "objective correlative".

1. Naomi Mitchison The Cleansing of the Knife and other poems (Edinburgh, 1978) p.45.

The exact nature of this view of Scotland is harder to assess. While drawing on history, it is not strictly historical; it possesses a strong sense of time and yet emphasises some quality which is continuous through time, always changing but still constant. Kirstie's idea is culturally based since the stream of life can only express itself through the people and culture of Scotland, yet it is trans-cultural since ultimately it is the dynamic life-force itself and not its temporary manifestations that persists. This, in a new Scottish guise, is the blend of realism and idealism which is at the core of Mitchison's imaginative outlook. It involves an appeal to the tacit and collective dimension of the psyche and is therefore hard to verbalise. As Mitchison expresses it in "The Talking Oats",

There is a thing I am needing to keep clean.
I have not the right words for it.
It could be between a man and a woman,
Or between a man and his work.
It is as hard as the granite and as clean as the air,
But I have not the words for it.
It could be between a man and other men,
Or between a man and his country,
But I have not the words for it right. 1

In many respects, the whole of The Bull Calves is an attempt to expand on this central germ. Yet, however often discussion of the novel leads back to the core of feeling, it is in no way reducible to it. Mitchison's endeavour to embody her sense of life historically, culturally and linguistically condition and enrich it; the more patient her submission to empirical reality, the more rewarding is her transcendence of individual and social naturalism.

1. Naomi Mitchison "Talking Oats", Chapman (Edinburgh, 1981), Vol.VI No.3-4, p.20.

A third voice in Kirstie's narration is that of the economic historian. Like Erif Der's comparative anthropology in The Corn King and Dione Bathurst's sociology in 'We Have Been Warned', this is a residue of the rationalist empiricist outlook which belongs more properly to the author than to her characters. The rationalistic attitude which is part of the thematic structure of these novels spills over into the mind of the principal protagonist; there is a confusion of viewpoint and the dramatic appropriateness of the character suffers. The following passage, for example, which describes developments at Gleneagles before Kirstie had lived and worked on the Borlum estate, has a text-book manner that stretches the conversational idiom to breaking-point.

There was no more runrig at Gleneagles, nor the wee starved cattle, nor the raw ditches, down to the rock itself, between the rigs in the infield, where each man had taken the turfs for his own strip. They had mostly been ploughed over and filled in and the cross ploughing itself had done all the good in the world to the fields, as stands to reason. The tenants now had long leases, with plenty conditions as to cropping and even enclosing, though not all the tenants cared to take on extra labour for that, with all my brother's persuading, but no more servitudes, except that all must help with the making of roads.

(The Bull Calves p.109)

This didacticism is rare in The Bull Calves and when it occurs it is a result of Mitchison's determination to stress an economic approach to social history.

Mitchison's main achievement as a historical novelist in The Bull Calves is her penetration of the eighteenth-century thought world of her characters. The notes which the author provides for the text reveal a new maturity of reflection on the significance of

language for the practice of the historical writer.

.. it is very clear when you come to consider the literary treatment of class and sex relationships. What happens is all expressed in words. Yet there is very little real explaining or when there is it is usually a bore and embarrassing to the reader. Instead, everything is implicit; it is generally understood that certain words and phrases will convey a complex of social behaviour. One hardly realises how much this is so until one tries to translate them into another language.

(The Bull Calves p.456)

The task of the historical novelist is, Mitchison argues, to capture this "background of the meaning of words", and in The Bull Calves she fulfils her own prescription.

The fabric of the novel is saturated with the spirit of "improvement". The principal representative of this mentality, the Laird of Gleneagles, Mungo Haldane, is never happier than when the conversation turns to liming, manuring, drainage and afforestation, but all serious-minded people in the novel, including Black William the Highlander, share his interest if not his passion. The antithesis between the traditional loyalties of the Highlands and the possibilities of practical development, brought to a head for William by the Forty-five, are highlighted by Mitchison in this way.

'But it was too late', Black William said. 'Our country had begun to save herself other ways. We had seen beyond the Stuarts. The things I was trying to do at Borlum last year and the year before - Kirstie and I together - they were small things, but if I had gone out at the head of my folk, the way Lady Anne Macintosh asked me to do, aye and more than her, I would not have got my turnips sown and harvested, nor got my tenants persuaded to try them; I would not have got them to bring the best of their kye to be served by my prize bull, nor to thresh their grain at the new Dutch mill that some of us have built - to thresh it there not as a servitude

and due to the laird, but of their own free will, because it was better and cleaner threshing. When the Prince landed at Moidart, my potatoes, the first I had tried out in an open field, forth of the walled garden, were in full leaf: folk coming out from Inverness even, to look at them and tell me they would never do, and I wondering if I had been right to try them in light soil or if I should have put more dung to them. While he was in Holyrood and some at least of my clan were there - and there were those who missed the fighting but didna care to miss the dinners and Assemblies! - I was working myself with the graips, getting my potatoes up. If I had left them and gone off, they might have been pulling them up by the shores and missing half of them and then telling me my crop was a failure. Ach, I know what my own Highlanders are like. I pitted the potatoes myself, some under oat straw and some under rashes; by the end of the winter some of my neighbours were coming over to ask about them, and might they have a boll or so to try!'

(The Bull Calves p.73)

There is a satisfactory merging of factual detail with the attitude of the character in this speech and a firm rhetorical structure. The growth of the crop and the progress of the rising are matched stage by stage to the advantage of the former. The significance of this is that it was William's father, Brigadier Macintosh, who had led the Jacobite army close to victory at Preston in the earlier rebellion of 1715. The movement of events has by-passed the Jacobite cause, transforming an actual possibility of political reversal into an anachronistic dream.¹ The presence of Scots idiom and Gaelic English turns of phrase in William's speech creates no difficulty or annoyance to the English reader with no knowledge of Scots, since the Scottishness of the language lies in its rhythmic appeal to the ear,

1. This is a judgement on the relative importance of the risings that is supported by recent research. See Bruce Lenman The Jacobite Risings in Britain 1689-1746 (London, 1980).

rather than in its diction. The result is economic and forceful in expression.

Mitchison's portrayal of the improvers is based on a reading of contemporary sources such as Cockburn of Ormiston's Letters to his Gardiner (1727-44), Brigadier Macintosh's Essay on Ways and Means (1729) (both men were in real life related to the Haldane family), and the Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland. The historical research, however, is thoroughly integrated into the character attitudes and not imposed on them. From her studies of Mungo, William and also of Robert Haldane Mitchison works back to a general portrait of the improving mentality which she sees as a quintessentially Lowland frame of mind. Kirstie expounds this doctrine of progress to Catherine in its ideal form.

'You see, Catherine, we in the Lowlands have been steady and settled and secure. We have things sorted up, the way every thing and every person has a place fixed. Each ox will go to his own stall in the byre, the sowing corn will be here and the meal corn there, the soc of the plough will be greased and wrapped after the spring, the sheep will be smeared one by one with tar and butter, one year in twenty-five the oak woods will be cut. There will be peats and coal, there will be stores against the winter, cheeses and hams and sugar loaves, salt herring and kippered salmon, pears and currants in syrup, tea and oranges, sauces and pickles with the date writ on them in ink by the mistress of the house, wines and beer and the great crocks of butter. There will be books in the study, knowledge of what has passed and thoughts for what is to come. There will be the Kirk Sessions and the heritors to take care of worship and morality; the Universities will press forward with learning and medicine; the Merchant companies and gilds, the City fathers and the Magistrates, they will take care of property. The Army and the police are there for our protection. There is an abundance of trades, and the polite arts have their place

in the capital; both in the clubs and in the drawing-rooms, will be found correctness of taste, boldness of disquisition and liberality of sentiment. An honest man has the world before him; though he start as a herd-boy or a journey-man, his son may be a banker or a general or famous as a wit. Morality is the muse of the north.'

(The Bull Calves pp.52-3)

Again a large measure of factual knowledge and historical understanding has been absorbed and rendered intimate to the character and appropriate to its context. It is not just the use of historically correct words - "boldness of disquisition and liberality of sentiment" - which achieves the effect since overall the passage makes no attempt to imitate period speech; it is the force of the whole conception, thoroughly integrated into the fabric of the novel that impresses. The reader has been supplied with an unspoken background to the words but so skilfully that the process of assimilation escapes notice.

Mitchison's grasp of the religious consciousness is always sure, but in The Bull Calves she excels in her treatment of the varieties of eighteenth-century religious experience. Kirstie's marriage to Andrew Shaw is precipitated by a revival in her of the Covenanting spirit, provoked by the death of her sister. Even as Kirstie succumbs to the religion of this brooding and bargaining God, its Calvinist rigours are becoming outmoded among the more prosperous classes. Her reversion is credible because it is set in the context of a traditional "Occasion" or Communion gathering. Partaking of the atmosphere both of an Old Testament sacramental festival and of a Scottish fair, the Occasions were a unique feature of Scottish life.¹

1. See, for example, Burns's satire "The Holy Fair".

'..... the crowds all in their best going from one preacher to another, responding with groans and cries, but not a few thinking more of the ale-barrels and the girls from other parishes than of the Word. The tenants' wives would have their hair braided and pinned back and the white linen toys over their heads, and the shoes and stockings on their feet that made them walk in a mincing way, for at that time the commonalty went bare-foot, mostly. And my father and Mungo and the heritors generally, in their sky-blue and red and tawny coats, and laced hats and swords and high boots, and the sun high and the ground trodden and the chapmen and tinkers crying their wares, or fighting and swearing between times. And each table with its own preacher, and the heaped slices of bread, and the claret in the wide silver cups: the bonny oaken claret barrels with the French brand mark of them. There was always a queer and a tense time on the Sabbath itself, when it came to the fencing of the tables, and some would come that shouldna have come, but others through terror of the Lord and ower much thinking on their own frailty, dared not come though they might have a great longing for the tables and the douce companionship and the Body of God. And times there would be, at one table or another, sudden sobbings and lively prayer and uprisings of the spirit.'

(The Bull Calves pp.72-3)

Mitchison's reconstruction depends on a combination of accurate descriptive detail ("the bonny oaken claret barrels with the French brand mark on them"), with an interpretation of the mood of the event. Appropriate Biblical phraseology is employed but the boldest stroke is a translation of the sense of acceptance and fellowship at the heart of evangelical protestanism from theological into poetic language: "a great longing for the tables and the douce companionship and the Body of God". The "Body of God" becomes a symbol for the kind of human group feeling that Mitchison depicts in Blood of the Martyrs, but it is placed firmly within the Scottish tradition by the ecclesiastical idiom "the tables", and by the original poetic phrase "douce companionship".

The easing of religious zeal and the growth of tolerance is represented in the personality of Mungo Haldane. Theological disputation is for him a pastime as serious and enjoyable as a discussion about agriculture or a law-suit, but religion no longer claims an absolute commitment. With some subtlety, Mitchison shows how a theological creed carries over into a general attitude, even when the creed itself has lost its former urgency and power.

Now all stood while Gleneagles took the prayers,
lengthily in a kind of discussion with the
Almighty, reminding him of this or that wee thing
that could have slipped His notice Aye,
he did things his own way, did Gleneagles, and
with a certainty that the ways of the Lord were in
some fashion like his own.

(The Bull Calves pp.221-222)

The serious talk of the younger Haldanes is more about political principals than about religious beliefs, although orthodoxy is presumed. Social thinking and action are moving out of the theological into the political arena: the age of tolerance had begun.

Historical reconstruction is taken very seriously in the making of The Bull Calves, penetrating beyond the level of costume and setting to capture the mentality of the period, but Mitchison's attitude towards history remains divided. The attention paid by Mitchison to material culture leads her to refer repeatedly in the notes for The Bull Calves to her "Marxist Praxis", and this interest is reflected, not always happily, in the speech of the characters. But the Marxist theory of economic causation remains an idea rather than an embodied reality. Even in the thirties Mitchison had been unconvinced by the Marxist reading of history, maintaining the related but independent operation of human character or spirit - the

"daimons".¹ It is as an intellectual discipline that economic or general history contributes to the construction of her fiction, not as a governing motive.

Yet The Bull Calves does stand in one tradition of the historical novel, and Mitchison is an heir of Scott's interest in contrasting epochs or types of society and the kind of characters dominant in them. In his classic study of the historical novel, Georg Lukacs advances this reason for the emergence of historicism in Germany.

This conscious growth of historicism, which receives its first theoretical expression in the writings of Herder, has its roots in the special position of Germany, in the discrepancy between Germany's economic and political backwardness and the ideology of the German Enlighteners, who, standing on the shoulders of their English and French predecessors, developed the ideas of the Enlightenment to a higher level. As a result not only do the general contradictions underlying the whole ideology of the Enlightenment appear more sharply there than in France, but the specific contrast between these ideas and German reality is thrust vigourously into the foreground. 2

A very similar argument could be applied to Scotland where, Scott, drawing on the work of John Millar and other Enlightenment theorists, pinpointed the contrast between the tribal society of the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and the developed, commercial society of the English-speaking Lowlands.³ Exactly the same contrast is at the heart of

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1. This is the argument of Naomi Mitchison's unpublished Russia Diary discussed in the previous chapter.
 2. Georg Lukacs The Historical Novel translated Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London, 1962) p.22.
 3. See Duncan Forbes "The Rationalism of Sir Walter Scott", Cambridge Journal (Cambridge, 1953) vii, pp.20-35.

The Bull Calves which takes as its theme the need for reconciliation between Highland and Lowland, between the improving Haldanes and the primitive loyalties of Black William.

To both Scott and Mitchison, the Jacobite rebellions, particularly the Forty-five, provide a pivot for their historical thinking, not unlike that offered by the French Revolution for European historiography. At this point in time the tribal and feudal past irrupted into the present and was decisively repudiated; it was a historical watershed marking, in Mitchison's words, "the recognisable dawn of the times we are living in."¹ Furthermore the attitude of both authors towards this turning-point is ambivalent. Scott recognised the necessity of change and yet regretted the passing of a more heroic age to which he still felt emotionally committed. Similarly Mitchison is on the side of the improvers, stressing the need for economic and social progress, but remains loyal to the values and emotions which the Highland way of life represents for her. In The Bull Calves she attempts to reconcile her faith in progress with her instinctive reaction in favour of the ancient and primitive in human culture.

However, despite all of these similarities between Scott and Mitchison, the latter fails Lukacs' litmus-test for a historical novelist.

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.432.

What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is the derivation of the individuality of character from the historical peculiarity of their age. 1

For Mitchison the roots of character, however conditioned by period, lie within the psyche. That is where the springs of action lie in The Bull Calves and not in the circumambient social and historical circumstances. This is underlined by the house-party setting of the novel which renders it unusually static. The protagonists are cut off from the historical events to which they constantly refer, in order that the source of these events within the psyche can emerge - the characters are the prior reality. This structure is the cause of some artificiality in the book which can only be understood if the psychologically representative nature of the action is realised. Even the apparently realistic plot which supports the surface texture of the novel points within itself to the Romance fable.

Mitchison is thus closer to Stevenson and his great novel of the Jacobite rebellions and the Highland-Lowland divide, Kidnapped, than to the Scott of Waverley and Rob Roy. For Mitchison as for Stevenson, the past is a mirror of the soul, an imaginative territory in which the lineaments of a contemporary psychic geography can be traced. A novel of this kind is a Romance, although the degree to which the texture of the work is imbued with empirical materials may vary as it does within Mitchison's own oeuvre. Yet this is as respectable a tradition of historical fiction as any other, and has as much if not a greater claim to the genre title. The historical Romance form, which Scott used only to neglect, antedates Scott and had continued to flourish despite Lukacs. Although in The Bull Calves

1. Georg Lukacs The Historical Novel translated Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London, 1962) p. 19

Mitchison takes history more seriously than in any of her other fictions, she remains a historical Romancer. On her own admission, "the muse of historical research is the Queen of faery".¹

At the centre of The Bull Calves is the love story of Kirstie and Black William. Their first meeting takes place, significantly, in 1715, shortly before the outbreak of rebellion. The occasion is a social one, but it is marred by political tensions, and Kirstie, with the arrogant partisanship of a teenager, turns her back on the kilted William Macintosh when he is introduced to her. She is also at this time being courted, in a half-serious, flirtatious way, by William's cousin, Lachlan Macintosh of Kyllachy, but, attracted as she may be in part, her Haldanish inner seriousness scorns the outer show and vaunting of the Highlanders, who with success in their nostrils are swept away by a mood of euphoric vainglory.

Kirstie wills herself into her disastrous marriage with Andrew Shaw, through a process which begins with the death of her sister Ann. Her grief provokes a state of introversion which is in stark contrast with the outer beauty of the season.

'So I made up my own mind that I wouldna listen to merle or mavis, goldie nor laverock. I would listen only to the voice of heaven and seek an assurance that in some way Ann and myself would be together again.'

(The Bull Calves p.79)

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.509.

Kirstie's experiences are skilfully transposed from the realm of psychological understanding to that of theological language. What she is undergoing in psychoanalytical terms is a Freudian death wish equivalent to Jung's descent into the unconscious.¹

'And I mind the orra grief in my heart turning to a more general thing, to a conviction of vanity and time passing and the folly of all human hopes and loves Thus I tore from myself all that appeared to come between me and my God.'

(The Bull Calves p.80)

Kirstie is driven, through fear of a God who wills the death of sisters, to attempt a propitiation: the sacrifice of herself in return for the guarantee that Ann is not ultimately lost to her.

'I began to feel that all could be made well, that an atonement and covenant could be arrived at, and that, in some way, myself and Ann could be covenanted together. But the Lord, on his side, was a hard bargainer and He could see through any shift of mine; nor would He be content with less than my whole body and soul and I swore to myself that I would take no bridegroom except direct from the Lord's hand and as a kind of earthly substitute for Himself.'

(The Bull Calves p.80)

The Biblical imagery of Kirstie's thoughts is appropriate to the Presbyterian culture in which she lives, especially to the seventeenth-century Covenanting temper to which she is reverting, but also camouflages the primitive bedrock of her conception. The pre-Christian

1. The key text for the Freudian death-wish is Sigmund Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", The Collected Works Vol.18 (1920-22), translated and edited James Strachey (London, 1955). Jung equates the death-wish with a descent into the unconscious but views it as potentially life-giving - a death and rebirth. See, for example, C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5, translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.328.

nature of her oath is revealed by her choice of witnesses - "and I took as my witness the Ochils and the stars above them, and the angels that were beyond the stars and yet as close as my elbow" (The Bull Calves p.80). From this point on, Kirstie lives her emotional life as if in a trance, a victim to unconscious impulses over which she has no control.

Kirstie marries Shaw because, as she tells Catherine, "You get what you expect in the bottom of your heart": he matches what, under the influence of the death-wish, she has resolved for herself. Similarly Kirstie, in her subdued pious mood, matches what the godly Shaw feels is due to him.

'I cannot mind that Andrew Shaw ever courted me, either before or after our marriage. It seems to me now that he was courting his own idea of salvation, and it must have seemed to him that I was part of it, the same way as it seemed to me that he was part of my own, that he was on the credit side of my bargain and covenant with the Lord. Aye, Catherine lassie, I thought I was sent.

(The Bull Calves p.84)

This is a model of Jungian projection. The male element or animus in Kirstie's nature projects itself onto Shaw, while his anima or female archetype projects itself onto Kirstie. Shaw becomes, in effect, a Christ figure - "an earthly substitute for the Lord himself"; Kirstie is for Shaw a godly "handmaiden of the Lord". Such an interchange, in place of a true relationship, is a recipe for disaster, and it is appropriate to the psychoanalytical analysis that the mistaken course should be pursued with such a large measure of pride and complacency.

Shaw's readiness to fulfil his part in this compact springs from

the fact that he is a split self or "doppelganger", a literary embodiment of the Scottish Puritan tradition.

"Aye, Andrew Shaw in his black coat, with his face white and drawn with passion and argument, and the congregation intent and drawn, too, by his passion, the grown folk hearing him out hour by hour and only a bairn here and there gurning at it, and I myself wondering, wondering, if this was rightly himself; if this was my husband, or if it was a spirit that took possession of him in the pulpit, or how at all to put the two halves of him, or if they were the same and not opposite, then maybe God and the devil were also the same person, only looking at different things.

(The Bull Calves p.84)

In technical terms, Shaw's overidentification with his conscious role as minister and preacher leads to a compensatory possession by what Jung terms his "shadow" or lesser self, which causes him to behave cruelly and lovelessly towards his young wife. The moral ambivalence of his behaviour indicates the grip of the unconscious which, according to Jung, does not distinguish between God and the devil. It is therefore no surprise, that Kirstie's animus, which has hitherto identified with Shaw as "an earthly substitute of the Lord" is attracted towards the god of the witches, the devil.

The novel does not explore Shaw as a personality; it accepts the "doppelganger" convention without detraction or elaboration. This is credible because Shaw only exists, like William's former wife Ohniwayio, at second hand through another character's narration. Moreover it is in accord with the literary economy of the book in which Shaw's function is principally representative - of Kirstie's mental state and of the psychology of Scotland as a whole. The egotistic but not unperceptive Kyllachy comments:

'Yonder, now, is the wee Whiggie that would have none of myself, but married a black crow of a preacher and is repenting it to this day! She is fast in her trap as poor Scotland herself, and as fully eager to bide there.'

(The Bull Calves pp.105-106)

When Naomi Mitchison began to write and plan for The Bull Calves in 1942, the link between her thinking and that of Jung was a direct one, although, according to her own testimony, she did not fully digest Jung's ideas until the novel was well under way.

I bought The Integration of the Personality in 1940 on the strength of several reviews, but though I started reading it that year or perhaps early in 1941, I was unable to go on. It had no significance for me, or rather I did not intend to allow it to have any significance at that date Actually I did read the book when I was more than halfway through my own in 1943. My book was by then completely planned, although none of the details of the last part had been worked out and I was not at all sure how the balance of personal relationships would finally swing. 1

Whatever the timing, and there is no hint of Jungian terminology in the earlier parts of the novel as there are in the last, it is clear that Mitchison was working along specifically Jungian lines, stimulated by the appearance of The Integration of the Personality (1940), a wide-ranging collection of Jung's papers. She had always been close to Jung's idea of the unconscious and his archetype theory but now, under his influence, she developed the key concepts of the male and female factors within the individual psyche, and of a possible integration between the unconscious and the conscious personality. Both of these ideas are worked through in The Bull Calves; they are

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.511.

central to the resolution of the novel and to Mitchison's future work.

After Shaw's death, for which Kirstie blames her own demonic involvements, she is in danger of succumbing altogether to the witch cult. Historically, witchcraft is associated with the era of intolerance, Puritan repression and plain barbarism from which "auld Phemie" is a hangover and to which Kirstie regressed through her marriage to Shaw. Psychologically, witchcraft is symbolic of the power of the unconscious in all its ambiguity. Yet despite its thematic importance, Mitchison does not provide a dramatic reconstruction of the cult. The actual activities of the coven, as opposed to Kirstie's imaginings, are passed over with a descriptive summary which relies heavily on traditional accounts of witch trials.¹ This is unfortunate, both because Mitchison's artistic powers are best concentrated by the challenge of sustained dramatic narrative, and because the omission of a concrete reference-point smudges the thematic guidelines. On the one hand, witchcraft is seen as an embodiment of original sin - "the evil in folks turning against themselves and others" (The Bull Calves p.91) - while on the other, Kirstie discerns in the posturings of the coven a celebration of life and fertility.

'Yet times I had a feeling that we were near to understanding in the heart of things that could have been turned to good, yet not good of a kind that would have been recognised by the respectable and the members of the congregation.'

(The Bull Calves p.166)

1. Mitchison discusses her sources in The Bull Calves (London, 1947) pp.498-503.

This ambiguity is not, in itself, problematic. Mitchison wishes to align witchcraft with the Mediterranean fertility cults and the worship of the mother goddess, which like all dealings with the Jungian unconscious can issue in creative self-renewal or destruction.¹ In Mitchison's words the Earth Mother is "a very early matriarchal archetype, savage and implacable as the pre-Hellenic, pre-Edda, and long pre-Christians' Gods were rumoured to be."² "Such Gods", she continues, "were man-eating and mad-making". This being is glimpsed in Ohniwayio, Mitchison's version of the "femme fatale", but in Kirstie's narrative, in the absence of any depiction of the witch cult, the implacable deity is reduced to the stature of a nasty, smelly old spaewife - a nursery bogle rather than an archetype.

Through witchcraft Mitchison wishes to present Kirstie's psychic disorientation and the hold on her of a perverted form of the powers of life which she has denied for so long, but she shies away from showing Kirstie directly as a witch. Evil in Mitchison's fiction is always distanced from the principal characters and exteriorised, here in the shape of Andrew Shaw and later in that of the American Indians. Its reality is pushed to the edges of the novel in order that it may be presented thematically as the absence of moral awareness rather than its conscious negation: Mitchison does not wish to accept the full implications of Jungian moral ambiguity.

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1. Links between the Scottish Witch Cult and Mediterranean fertility religion are cited in Robert Graves The White Goddess (London, 1946), pp.63-64. Mitchison was greatly interested in Graves's mythography and began a correspondence with him about it in 1948.
 2. Naomi Mitchison: The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.502.

In contrast to the treatment of Kirstie and the witches, William's story is a vivid, dramatic narrative. Here the Romance evocativeness of The Bull Calves is at its strongest and the empirical surface at its most diaphanous. It is important to remember that the whole Kirstie and William plot is unashamedly romantic in both the technical and the general senses of that word. In the blunt phraseology of Mitchison's planning notes, it is to be "a simple plot of the boy finds girl, loses girl and finds girl type":¹ exile, perilous journeys, and losses and rediscoveries of identity are only to be expected. Kirstie, herself, is compared within the novel to her real-life ancestress, Marjorie Lawson, the heroine of Sir David Lyndsay's love-story, The Historie of Squyer Meldrum, which like The Bull Calves combines realistic drama with Romance. Marjorie's meeting, in the poem, with Meldrum, which results in her showing him a "notable kindness", is a type for Kirstie's encounter, also at Gleneagles, with William, then a ragged fugitive whom she succours.

Moreover, although Mitchison follows the interaction of the conscious moral and the irrational self in both Kirstie and William, it is the latter as the Highlander and Celt, who is most strongly orientated towards the unconscious passions. Again the schematic sub-structure of the novel emerges in Mitchison's notes.

I want to get the Highland-Lowland thing: the Celtic death-wish and egalitarianism and passions as against the Lowland wish for agape, atonement, each individual in his place in the hierarchy, the life-will, gradualism. 2

1. These notes are preserved with the manuscript in an uncatalogued collection in the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

2. See note 1 above.

Without attempting at present to cash each of these abstractions in the novel's terms, it is apparent that the narrative of William's loss of Kirstie, and his consequent death-wish or submission to the powers of the unconscious, will be a heightened one, and that it will tend to the symbolic rather than the naturalistic end of Mitchison's imaginative and linguistic spectrum.

William himself comments on the difference between his and Kirstie's experiences, gesturing towards the authorial view of psychological projection and the kind of reality it bestows on its objects.

'You are saying that the one side is true and the other utterly false; I wouldna like to say that. But I have a thought that Kirstie's imaginings on the Horny were, some way, yon same part of her soul got loose and become a person on its own. I met this in the flesh in Ohniwayio and gave it power.'

(The Bull Calves p.279)

This is a specific reference to the Jungian theory of the anima or animus component of the psyche projecting itself on a male or female figure and dominating the personality, but its literary relevance lies in the phrase "in the flesh". Mitchison's symbolic story-making is most successful when most concrete: the inner drama of the Romance form is clothed in an accurately constructed and vividly coloured shell of setting and event.

The tone of William's story is fixed with his opening words - "Did you ever see a shape in your dreams and then meet it in real life, Patrick?" (The Bull Calves p.274). It is a first-person oral narrative whose heightened atmosphere derives from the emotions of the

teller, as the next sentence makes plain.

'They were wearing all their braws, the two of them walking through the bleak Boston streets between the houses of tarred or dark painted wood, going like wolves staring and listening. And oh, Patrick, I was sick and out of heart with Boston'

(The Bull Calves p.274)

The visual and rhythmic qualities of the words and the pacing of the sentences are used poetically to evoke a dreamlike intensity. This is the technique of Coleridge's "Ryhme of the Ancient Mariner" and it is backed up, as in the poem, by the expressive force of colloquial idioms and dialect; Mitchison's Scots is fluent and accomplished in direct speech which accounts for two thirds of the novel. Thematically, the drabness of William's civilised and commercial existence in Boston is contrasted with the strangeness, colour and naturalness of the two Indians.

'There was the flash of forest bird colour from her mittens and mocassins He wore his crown of erect feathers and in his pierced ear plumes of pale and quivering swansdown and on one shoulder the brilliant feathers of a jay. They didna speak. There was a tracery of pattern on his face, colours of earth and autumn.'

(The Bull Calves p.275)

Mitchison's poetry of material culture is operative in her description of the Indians, as is her anthropological approach to cultural understanding. While concealing none of the barbarity and violence entailed, William is still able to see Indian warfare as "a matter of custom and continuance and a placation of spirits and ancestors." (The Bull Calves p.294)

'It is part of the Indian custom and honour to go on raids, not with the nearer tribes, with whom there are alliances, but beyond. This will be part of the reason for the sudden and senseless raids upon white settlements, that are thought on as so out of measure cruel and treacherous. They are not the same as the Highland raids of a hundred years back, a matter of taking food and gear The time for the Indian raids will be determined partly by the wishes and policy of the ruling women, who keep up memories of ancient wrongs for the sake of their own power and who will sometimes use wars as a distraction for young warriors who might otherwise fight amongst themselves or with their allies.'

(The Bull Calves p.290)

The comparison which William makes between North American Indian and Highland culture is important for though their raiding customs may differ, they are for Mitchison alike in several respects. Their systems of land tenure are similar, both in their concept of the earth as a resource held in common, and in their susceptibility to the depredations of unscrupulous capitalism. This is why the Indians' account of their dealings with the Boston lawyers strikes a responsive chord in William's experience.

'.. and in my mind I was interpreting the thing into terms of the cheating and bewilderment and hatred that I knew with my own heart and in my own first tongue, so that words of the Gaelic that I had not been using much in the last few years came back on me in a blinding and bewildering way.'

(The Bull Calves p.277)

More fundamentally both cultures are, in Mitchison's conception, based more on emotion than on reason; they are close to nature and thus in touch with the unconscious mind which, for Mitchison as for Jung, is primarily an internalisation of the natural world, its powers and spirits. Both peoples believe in the world of spirits, in divination,

and dream oracles; and their cosmology is mythic, revolving around the existence of gods and other supernatural agencies, although in the Scottish Highlands these primitive conceptions have been overlaid with Christian ideas. William relates the effect Ohniwayio had on him to the enchantment that a fairy woman might cast over a fascinated mortal in Celtic fairy lore, the fairy queen being essentially a diminution of the earlier even more powerful mother goddess.

'But it was otherwise yon night under the snow-banked branches, a deep, dark night, and the Queen, the nixie, the woman of the Sidhe asleep on my plaid, and I wanting to be lost in the darkness, in the fairy hill.'

("The Bull Calves" p.283)

"This is the Celtic thing", comments Mitchison, "in which passion is a fate to which one must submit, as happened to Tristram and Iseult or to Deirdre and Naisi."¹ This is also the Freudian death-wish which Mitchison equates with Jung's descent into the unconscious or direct encounter with an archetype. In crude mythic terms William is eaten by the mother goddess: he is in the grip of his anima which has projected itself onto Ohniwayio.

The step from anima to goddess is a simple one since Jung asserts repeatedly that his archetypes are "numinous" like divine beings. In a letter to Robert Graves, provoked by reading his The White Goddess (1946) in 1948, Mitchison makes the connections explicit.

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.470.

It would also I think be possible to formulate the whole thing in Jungian terms. His archetypes are certainly gods and goddesses. I am not quite sure how far one can go with the question of which comes first, but at the moment we certainly have them all pretty deep inside us. Jung's concept of the anima is no doubt his vision of the White Goddess.¹

Accompanying, then, the character and social-historical portraits of Kirstie and William is a layer of psychological symbolism that converts the Romance narrative into a fable for Everyman. Both Kirstie and William are protagonists in a psychic drama whose universality is implied by a poetic and symbolic use of mythic materials. Behind the horned god of the witch cult and the Indian femme fatale lurks the same mother goddess, the dark, irrational, amoral libido.² In their conflict with this goddess, Kirstie and William are not only Everyman and Everywoman but embodiments respectively of the anima and animus which must be united and reconciled if integration is to be achieved.

This symbolism reaches its climax in the crucial meeting between Kirstie and William. Numbed with fear and misery, and drugged by her retreat from the conscious life which has brought her so much unhappiness, Kirstie anticipates a final encounter with the Devil

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1. Unpublished letter from Naomi Mitchison to Robert Graves, dated 16th November 1948.
 2. For an identification of the devil or horned god with fertility religion and thus with the mother goddess, see Robert Graves The White Goddess p.353. The mother, one aspect of Graves' white goddess, was, according to Graves, referred to in the Scottish context as Hecate or the Queen of Faery, which is how William thinks of Ohniwayio.

himself. On the other side, William approaches Kirstie's house, aware that his meeting with her will be decisive, whether for good or ill. On an appropriately moonlit night (the moon is the tutelary sphere of the night and the unconscious), William knocks, feeling his own actions to be like the knocking at the mysterious and fateful house which so often awaits the traveller in Highland folktales of supernatural encounter. William's journey into the unconscious may result in love or death.

'there seems to be a moment in my mind, a watershed between two deep glens, and if the runnel in the bog had flowed a different way, I might have killed you and myself.'

(The Bull Calves p.176)

This experience is like a dream, "the same dream", as Kirstie states, "that is in half the stories and the pipe tunes." It is thus for Mitchison a Celtic dream but only because the Gael is representatively the primitive with access to the unconscious.

'It is not Scotland's dream,' said Kirstie, 'and I doubt it isna a Christian dream at all. It comes out of the black night at the back of us before we knew of the blessed light.'

(The Bull Calves p.176)

In the Jungian phraseology, the danger of the situation is either that William's anima, now disassociated from Ohniwayio may project itself onto some other unsuitable figure, or that, in its possession of the self, the anima may become like the shadow, reversing the ideals of consciousness and diverting the energies of the unconscious to evil, violence and destruction. Kirstie too is in the power of her anima but the consequence for her as a woman is the disassociation of her animus and its identification with the devil, an embodiment of

her shadow. Both face "the perils of the soul". The saving of the situation is that in both cases, the disassociated part of the psyche identifies with a real, loving person: the image and the reality cohere, in the start of the process Jung describes as integration, namely the bringing of the parts of the psyche into dynamic equilibrium, thus enabling the growth of a stable personality or, as Jung phrases it, an individuated self.

In describing this process, Jung often falls back on religious language, but in The Bull Calves, Mitchison undertakes the reverse operation of translating the Jungian model of integration back into a religious model of salvation, appropriate to the eighteenth-century context of her historical novel. To counter Kirstie's terror, William frequently resorts to the theology of salvation or atonement.

'I hoped that the Lord would strike me soon and sudden. And times, William, I am asking myself, would he do that yet?'

'He could', said William, 'but in His mercy He has accepted us with all our sins, aye all and worse than your own for the sake of His Son.'

(The Bull Calves p.166)

At the crisis meeting, by William's own account, his thoughts turned to "God and His Son" and "redemption".

This language ought to be set alongside Jung's emphasis on the need for the sacrifice of irrational gratification, in order that the moral self may emerge from the sway of the unconscious and harmony be restored in the commonwealth of the personality. While Jung interprets myths of sacrifice as psychologically functional representations of

this process, Mitchison, working from the same humanistic stance as Jung, recreates the theology of atonement as a myth of integration. This is appropriate both to the moral argument of the novel and its mythic imagery, since the myth of the father God and his willingly sacrificed son balances the consuming mother goddess archetype, evoked in Kirstie and William's narratives of psychic descent.

The humanistic stance is a paradoxical one, requiring a myth of salvation but denying the existence of any saviour other than ourselves. Jung is categorical that the domination of the self by any archetypal figure is a surrender of mature, individuated personality, which leads Mitchison to enquire, "Can we now be saved, not necessarily by a Saviour-personality, but by some method more acceptable to our epoch?".¹ In this area religion and psychoanalysis are as entwined for Mitchison as politics and religion in the nineteen thirties. Her question really means, "how can we come to terms with the power of the unconscious, with our own deep-seated irrationality?". It is into this kind of discourse that William's account of the problem must be translated, but the underlying interpretation does not detract from Mitchison's skilful literary handling of religious language.

'There is a deep part of ourselves that we cannot rightly know and that might be some way the natural man and woman before the Fall and also before Redemption. And whiles it is close to God's love and innocent and full of the bonniest colours and sweet sounds and scents. But whiles it is equally close to the Pit and the things of it. Yet we must come to terms with it before we are whole or can be wholly saved. But it will send its messengers in the shape of dreams and visions and if we are feared of them they will become real on us and we will worship them.'

("The Bull Calves" p.327)

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.502.

One mode of salvation, within the eighteenth-century world of The Bull Calves, is when the image charged with the energy of the unconscious coalesces with a real human relationship, and allows the irrational and the moral selves to be integrated. In this sense William saves Kirstie and becomes for her a Christ to replace the brooding, angry God of Andrew Shaw which drives her into the arms of the devil, and behind him the mother goddess, queen of his fertility rites.

For a moment he stood over her, black angry like the Father, aye a jealous God, but, as she acknowledged sin and would have welcomed the blow, yet was but a moment off minding on her first husband, Andrew Shaw, and comparing the two men angry, for the first time since her marriage, Black William was kneeling beside her, his arms round her in compassion and understanding, so that all yon comparison was past but another maybe come in its stead.

(The Bull Calves p.326)

Equally Kirstie is William's salvation, although, in this fiercely Protestant context, the Christian parallelism of the Virgin Mary must be suppressed. It is interesting that William's Episcopalianism does in some respects, such as his habit of praying for his dead father, incline to Roman Catholicism, but Mitchison does not push the analogies. She does, however, find support for Jung's theory of the anima in the Gaelic idiom of endearment.

'Aye,' he said, 'and you are the image and opposite and equal in my own dark waters, o m'eudail, Kirstie Haldane, my breath, my soul. Often enough have I called you my soul, and now I know why it was I did it.'

(The Bull Calves p.329)

A true union, then, of the male and female components of the psyche is a means of integration or salvation. This is akin to the treatment of marriage in The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931) where it is represented as a "kataleptike phantasia", an experience so real amidst the series of delusory appearances constituting ordinary reality that it lays hold on one and becomes in itself a standard of truth. In this regard Mitchison had arrived at archetype theory before reading Jung, for the union of the male and the female, or as Jung more generally terms it a "conjunctio oppositorum", is one of the "transformation archetypes", a category which remains extremely vague in Jung's writings, but which indicates important psychic processes bridging one state of life and another.

A further religious model for integration within The Bull Calves is that of "guidance". This is equivalent to Jungian therapy, the inner dialogue of self and soul which the relationship of patient and therapist externalises. In the context of eighteenth-century religious experience, Mitchison uses the Quakers as an analogue for the kind of guidance or therapy with which she is concerned.

'There are contradictions in us', said William, hesitating, walking about the room, 'and if one refuses to allow for them, then one can see that far less into events and into how people will act on a given occasion Only maybe there is a kind of direction which one can take in the interpretation of all of them into life.'

'And that direction?' asked Patrick.

'That is of God,' said William, 'and shown by the Inner Light' .

(The Bull Calves pp.279-80)

This is the mature Mitchison position on the relationship between the

rational and irrational aspects of human nature: one must take sensitive account of the irrational factors but attempt to move them in a moral and rational direction, although not always by use of reason alone.

William's Quaker confession also sets Mitchison's theology in secular perspective. For William, as for his creator, a theological creed carries no authority: the touchstone of reality is the self - the inner word - which may borrow the imagery and forms of religious tradition, according to its needs and purposes. This runs directly counter to Patrick's Presbyterian theology of revelation, with the Church as its sole guardian and the ministers as official interpreters.

'We find it mightily comforting to have the forms and strength of a deep-rooted Church, Kirstie and I, who have been so terrible tossed in the dark waters. We are less certain of ourselves than the Elect of the Established Presbyterian Church, and when we canna get addressing God ourselves for very shame, when we are most humble, Patrick, then we have the set patterns of prayer to hold on to. They are grand and bonny prayers, yon, like great and ancient trees, like the silvers and hemlocks of the American forests.'

("The Bull Calves" p.287)

The imagery and forms of religion are to Mitchison, like mythology, a vital symbolic resource for modern man but not a figuring of some supernatural reality; for salvation man must look to his own potentially creative inwardness.

Kirstie and William's drama of integration releases them from introspection for action in the social sphere, both because they are objectively better able to make right judgements and subjectively because they have achieved the status of aware selves and are equipped

for leadership. Throughout the novel the role played by the couple in the co-operative enterprise at Borlum, and in the task of creating good relationships in the Gleneagles household, and therefore in Scotland as a whole, is a major focus of approval.

Similarly William's search for and openness to the inner light enables him to curb and redirect the strong passions of his Highland self. In this task he has to reckon with the alter ego Kyllachy who, in a Highland equivalent of the Lowland "doppelganger", evidences the Highland character in its most degenerate and destructive form. To reply to Kyllachy's treacheries with Highland pride and anger is to play into the hands of the plotter: passionate action, however noble, can only thicken the tangle. But careful contemplation, discrimination and considered judgement can move the situation forward in a positive direction.

He saw that things were not better than they had been, but worse, and he knew it had been by his own fault, a mistake of judgement which he must consider morally as a mistake of right and wrong: a sin. Silent as an Indian prisoner he stood in a deep kenning that it had come about because he had acted as a gentleman, not as a Christian. Repenting, he waited for the Inner Light, which did not come. It appeared that he must retrace his steps, follow the trail back through the briar patch of actions to where he had taken the wrong fork, blinded by a mind flap of the thunder birds, the war ones The trail had begun in anger and a breaking away from Patrick and the slow deliberation that was giving anger no assuagement. When Patrick had spoken of what he had discovered in Inverness anent Kyllachy's taking of the Government money, a thing had flared in him beyond bearing. He had said to himself that it was anger for what had been done on his father. But now he saw it clearly as a prideful cover to his own guilt. And Kirstie had begged him not to go yet, but he had broken in a fine and refreshing unthought and manly indignation from her and the Haldanes, only James following. He had said he would break up the alliance before it had gone too far, or come to terms. But it was more like that he had drawn it together. Anger and pride had hooded his Light at the fork. The trail went nowhere.

Moral self-examination and clear-headed reflection allow William to reconstruct his approach, arguing not from affronted dignity but the need to temper the letter of the law with a justice that is also mercy, and from the urgent necessity of making a forward-looking start to the rebuilding of their divided and embittered society. William's new tack is sustained by "a small glow of guidance" (The Bull Calves p.317): the pagan, Cletic archetypes yield to the Christian.

The moral argument of the Romance narratives, developed from psychoanalytical insight and imaginative exploration, links them to the household plot and realistic drama, since integration is on the psychological level an analogue for the peacemaking and reconstruction which is required socially and nationally. This was the value of Jung's theory of integration to Mitchison as a writer: it offered a thematic bridge between the moral consciousness and the irrational self, whose irreconcilability had haunted the structure of The Corn King and We Have Been Warned. In The Bull Calves a common moral theme binds the contrasting facets of the novel.

The Romance narratives are also woven into the fabric of the work through the religious idiom in which their psychic movement is expressed. The use of religion in The Bull Calves is thus two-sided in that it is both personally expressive of psychological attitude, and indicative of the social background. However, the literary quality of Mitchison's religious reconstruction is such that its dramatic reality takes precedence over the analytic diversity of her thinking. In short the psychological and social themes of the novel are convincingly embodied in the religious attitudes of the characters.

The primary impression on reading The Bull Calves is of full-bodied characters, presented "in the round", yet it is evident from the schematic skeleton of the novel, preserved in Mitchison's notes, that each of the principal figures is representative. The economic themes of the novel are prominent in the characterisation of Mungo the improver; the political content gravitates towards Patrick, the anti-establishment egalitarian; while Kirstie and William themselves are the main focus of the psychological and social themes, uniting in their own personalities the Romance narratives and the household drama. Mitchison is successful here, as never before, in the consistency and realism of her characterisation but sacrifices nothing of her thematic range.

This achievement is intimately related to the circumstance that the characters in the novel are consciously modelled on Mitchison's relations, both her living family and her Haldane ancestors. Mungo, Patrick and Robert Haldane were existing historical persons, attested in a wealth of family papers and letters and in their own writings,¹ but in turning them from historical source material into living personalities Mitchison was influenced by her contemporary knowledge of the Haldane family. Mixed up with Mungo and Robert are Mitchison's own uncles, particularly Richard, Viscount Haldane, and her father, J.S.Haldane. Patrick owes many character traits to Mitchison's brother, J.B.S.Haldane. Moreover, framing all these portraits is Mitchison's dramatic "set", the household at Gleneagles, which is an amalgam of the twentieth-century family houses at Gleneagles and Cloan, that

1. See Sir James A.L. Haldane The Haldanes of Gleneagles (London, 1929) and Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.407 and pp.412-19.

Mitchison knew well as a child, projected back in time.

The case of Kirstie and William is somewhat different in that they were not historical personalities. Yet they too are a compound of past and present, a mixture of the empirical and the ideal, which is the mainspring of Mitchison's fiction. Kirstie belongs to the succession of authorial "alter egos" that preside over the major novels, but she is emotionally distanced from her creator by the thoroughness of the historical reconstruction. William is the Highlander, partly of Mitchison's dreams and love, and partly of her immediate experience. He is the "Donnachadh Ban" of the autobiographical poem sequence "The Cleansing of the Knife", a figure that derives both from a Highlander whom Mitchison knew and loved at Carradale and from a wider poetic conception of the Gael. This symbolic dimension is present even in the name, fair Duncan, which is also the name of the famous eighteenth-century Gaelic poet, Duncan Ban MacIntyre whose verse seems to embody the essence of the freedom-loving, natural Highlander.¹

What is important is not the genesis of this tangled skein of fact and imagination but its significance for the completed novel. Because the subject-matter of The Bull Calves coincided with Mitchison's own family background the historical was rendered personal and the personal historical in a fashion unique for Mitchison's fiction: the antitheses of objective historical construction and

1. See The Songs of Duncan Ban MacIntyre edited Angus MacLeod (Edinburgh, 1952). The eighteenth-century poet was a gamekeeper, the modern Duncan a forester. Macintyre was well known for his hunting trips to Kintyre where Carradale is situated.

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subjective inspiration were synthesised. The whole novel, including the empirical content, is pulled together and animated by the author's exploration of her own relationships and her historical, social and psychological roots. As Mitchison write in an unpublished work about her mother's family, the Trotters of Lothian, "exploring my ancestors I explore myself".¹

1. The manuscript of this unpublished work, Hide and Seek, completed in 1966, is held in an uncatalogued collection in the Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BULL CALVES - II

The ending of 'The Bull Calves' confirms decisively the Romance tenor of the novel as a whole. The realistic household drama reaches, in Mitchison's own phrase, "a complete impasse"¹ at the close of Part or Act IV with an irreconcilable tangle of antagonisms and politico-legal complications, inspired in the first instance by the arrival at Gleneagles of a hapless and harmless Jacobite fugitive, but reflecting on a deeper level the divisions of the psyche and thus of Scottish society. Although Kirstie and William have been freed for constructive action through their personal integration, Kyllachy remains no less devious, Patrick no less intractable and the younger Haldanes no less stiffly principled. The novel seems on target for either a tragic conclusion or at the best for one which acknowledges the muddle and ambivalence attendant upon the quest for goodness and justice in human society.

Instead Mitchison completes the life-affirming movement begun in the Romance story-behind-the-story, bringing the mythic or symbolic sub-structure of 'The Bull Calves' to the forefront of the action and transposing Kirstie and William's rediscovery of identity and meaning into a comic reconciliation for the cast of the household drama. The arrival of Duncan Forbes of Culloden to reunite the conflicting

1. From Mitchison's manuscript notes, held in an uncatalogued Mitchison collection in The Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

parties is a pure example of the "deus ex machina" convention put to comic purposes. Although Forbes is a historical figure his individual characterisation is minimal, drawing little more than a veil over his archetypal and symbolic status.

As an ageing and sick man who has worn himself out in the service of his country, Forbes is a paradigm of sacrifice, which can mediate the transforming energy required if man is to achieve goodness and a pattern of life which makes for happiness. He is a Christ figure, a merciful, just and self-sacrificing judge, who as the earthly embodiment of the Father God balances the pull of the irrational and the unconscious, symbolised by the mother goddess. He is also a mediator, bridging the gap between law and social structure, morality and love, and that between the ideal and the actual. As he declares to the Haldanes, "I judge as a Christian and one of a community of Christians". (The Bull Calves p.386).

Forbes is the successor, in the novel's thematic development, of Prince Charles as a king who does for his people, the symbolic figure who enshrines, in Mitchison's fiction, the solidarity of the defeated and oppressed, and the persistence of the values of love and imagination which history has spurned. The knowledge of Prince Charles in hiding or exile broods over the early parts of the novel, harboured by those who served and knew him.

And of a sudden he was remembering the few words he had spoken with the Prince. Thriepland of Fingask had brought him in, past the sentries, easily enough. They had spoken in French; the Prince had liked that, had taken his hand, speaking eagerly, looking him in the eyes: "angoisse de coeur se souvenant d'amour passe....."

(The Bull Calves pp.35-6)

Mitchison's treatment of Prince Charles as a king who dies for his people is similar to the well-attested identification of the Pretender with the year-king in Highland Jacobite tradition, such as the songs of Alexander MacDonald.¹ But the whole movement of The Bull Calves is away from the backward-looking sentiments which Mitchison sees as indicative of Scottish culture, in particular the Highlands; and this is represented symbolically by the replacement of pagan, primitive motifs with Christian ones, of unconscious subjection and disassociation from socio-political reality with morally-directed social reconstruction. The death-wish is to give way to agape, atonement and the life-will, although the new directions will be consonant with rather than antithetical to old loyalties, since they will be founded on the same shared sense of community. Prince Charles is replaced as a symbolic figurehead for the Scottish community by Duncan Forbes.

The portrayal of Forbes as a Christ paradigm also has a contemporary aspect - the kind of symbolic continuity that Mitchison discerns in the repetitions of history - since as the Second World War drew to a close Scotland again had, in Mitchison's view, a leader and reconciler in Tom Johnston the Secretary of State. Mitchison was greatly impressed by Johnston, and saw his visit to Carradale in the autumn of 1944 as a potential catalyst to community self-consciousness and endeavour.

The great thing for us this month has been the coming of Tom Johnston He says that we in the Highlands have got too much into the habit of

1. See J.L.Campbell (ed.) Highland Songs of the Forty-Five (Edinburgh, 1933).

asking for grants and special treatment and then sitting back: we must help ourselves - but he will see that our efforts get what they deserve. He spoke to the fishermen, the farmers and the Town Councillors and to a crowded village meeting at Carradale, where everyone is shouting for a harbour. He spoke of Scotland 'never free so long as we have poverty, unemployment and sickness', and his plans for ending that with 'goodwill and coherence among our folks'. 1

Johnston's message is one of humanistic self-help but he is nonetheless the bringer of a saving hope and Mitchison's description, written for the soldiers of the 51st Highland Division, has Biblical overtones: the "coming" of a redeemer who will "see that our efforts get what they deserve", and bring an end to "poverty, unemployment and sickness".² He is like Duncan Forbes a Christ figure.

The same complex of meanings spanning the past and the present, the fictional heterocosm and the modern world, underpins the language of The Bull Calves, since the conversational Scots, used in narrative and dialogue alike, is a carefully calculated and sophisticated register whose genesis and intentions are interlinked with the themes of the novel.

As in her previous historical novels, Mitchison, despite her familiarity with contemporary documentary material, eschews antiquated or period speech in favour of a modern idiom which is yet responsive

1. From Pibroch no.113. This was the newsletter of the 51st Highland Division for September 1944.

2. This is the Christianity of Mitchison's Blood of the Martyrs (London, 1939).

to and shaped by historical language. Thus the Scottish historical novel demands a modern Scots idiom.

The obvious thing was, then, to base my convention on modern Scots, the spoken language. In the past I have always used spoken, rather than written, English as my standard. The spoken language is the more fluent instrument. Spoken Scots is equally good and lively. 1

This linguistic choice mirrors the structure of the novel which, in both the dialogue of the realistic drama and the Romance oral narratives, leans heavily on the spoken word. But by the twentieth century there was no common Scots tongue, since the various spoken dialects operated without the standardisation of a central, formal or written register. Faced with this lack, Hugh MacDiarmid evolved his own "synthetic" Scots, working from literary and dictionary traditions as well as the spoken dialects, while Lewis Grassie Gibbon created an idiosyncratic Scots prose style by shaping his English prose to the rhythms and diction of the north-east of Scotland.

Mitchison's solution is closer to Gibbon's than MacDiarmid's since she too raises the pitch of a local dialect, in her case that of Kintyre, to fashion a distinctive English literary style. The end result may not please linguistic purists, of whatever school, since Scots, English and at points Gaelic are freely mingled, but the sustained rhythmic effect binds the novel with a cohesion of language lacking in The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931). Since Kintyre speech is from the start a combination of Lowland and Highland influences, it is particularly suited to this process of extension

1. Naomi Mitchison The Bull Calves (London, 1947) p.408.

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through borrowings from Lowland Scots and Gaelic, but Mitchison's intent is neither linguistic nor historical. Her aim is to transform her own disparate experience of the Scots language into a literary and personal vehicle expressing national themes.

Mitchison's success in this enterprise cannot be judged by her technical competence in the handling of dialect, though that is considerable, but by an evaluation of her claims for the inherent meaningfulness of language. When the novel was still in the making she wrote of The Bull Calves ,

It is written for the common people of Scotland in current Scots speech, in order to show them their own past in relation to their present, in particular the relation between Highland and Lowland in one nation, and the relation of the individual to society I am not simplifying or proletarianising but writing of difficult and complex situations in words and a manner that will be understood. 1

After the nineteen thirties, the intellectual and factual content of Mitchison's fiction is often related to this desire to democratise knowledge and thus to equip people for political responsibility, but her ambitions for the impact of her fiction go far beyond straightforward didacticism.

I am definitely writing from a social and political position and with the hope of altering the feelings and actions of those for whom I write: firstly by giving them self confidence through seeing their own tongue used and not despised and then by speaking of things that are their pride but which have been taken from them. 2

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1. From Naomi Mitchison "Fundamental Values", an essay written in the early nineteen forties. Mrs. Mitchison thinks that it may have been published in a Glasgow periodical but I have been unable to trace it. Manuscript held in the uncatalogued Mitchison Collection in The Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.
 2. Ibid.

Mitchison goes on to link this appeal with Utopianic Romancing since the idyllic reintegration of Romantic Comedy towards which The Bull Calves tends is a vision of love-centred socialism: the reader is to suppose that "in a new and awakened Scotland (visualised no doubt as part of an awakened world) certain things and certain ways of living would be possible."¹ This statement implies an increasing recognition on Mitchison's part of the nature of her own art, which, never easy with the aestheticism of modernist writers in the twenties, expands in The Bull Calves the moral and humanistic imperatives of Auden's "parable art". Mitchison's major Scottish novel aims at nothing less than a direct challenge to the unconscious mind which she conceives as acting like a god or goddess in its influence on the conscious self.

On this reckoning, the language of The Bull Calves is designed to convey, not just a particular moral or social structure, but a condition of the psyche, both communal and individual. Despite the disciplining and conditioning effect of its historical and naturalistic reference, it is the poetic innerness of the language that predominates, leaving the empirical content as a veil of plausibility drawn over the novel's moral and spiritual intent. The language is a psychic code to which the reader can consciously or unconsciously respond because of his own innerness, his own Scottish or behind that, archetypal identity.

1. From Naomi Mitchison "Fundamental Values", an essay written in the early nineteen forties. See note 1 on p.244.

This claim to inherent meaningfulness is closely connected to Mitchison's use of the term myth since it is by means of the same symbolic appeal to the unconscious that, in the wake of early twentieth century anthropology, she held myth to be socially, politically and psychologically functional in primitive communities. There is at present no consensus either within or without anthropology¹ as to the nature and significance of myth, but, when employed in literary criticism, the term is normally both descriptive of a work which is intensely symbolic, and evaluative, in that the meaning of the work is held to be existentially important; it is not confined to any particular kind of narrative. In a narrower sense literary myth is often associated with a group of major twentieth century writers such as Joyce, Yeats, Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and John Cowper Powys who were directly influenced by the ideas of Frazer, Jung, Freud, the Cambridge School, Durkheim, and the other founding fathers of anthropology and psychoanalysis; not only was their treatment of literary tradition and their understanding of myth shaped by these thinkers but they utilised the customs, traditions and narratives on which the anthropologists had focussed attention.

Yet each of these writers put similar ideas to strikingly different literary uses, transforming in the process the meaning of their inherited materials. So with Mitchison, the application of the label "myth" depends on a parallel redefinition of its significance in

1. For a good general discussion of divergent theories of myth, see G.S. Kirk Myth, its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures (Berkeley and Cambridge, 1970).

the light of her own work. Such specific redefinition, supported by consideration of the general importance of the idea of myth to Mitchison as a thinker and writer, is a necessary preliminary to a critical assessment of Mitchison's view of her fiction.

The thinker to whom Mitchison is most closely related is Jung, for reasons which concern her idea of myth, and for some that reflect the intellectual context of both the psychoanalyst and the novelist. Mitchison the Haldane could not but be attracted by the apparent objectivity and empiricism of Jung's approach to the psyche. "The instinctive archaic basis of the mind," writes Jung characteristically, "is a matter of plain fact and is no more dependent on individual experience and personal choice than is the inherited structure and functioning of the brain or any other organ."¹ Jung's science, however, was not the mechanistic causation of Freud for, although like Freud he based much of his language on biological models, he allowed for the concept of the organ as a whole and for the development through time, known as teleology.

In Jung's hand the teleological approach burgeoned into an imaginative exploration of the human mind which combines intuition with reason and uses biology less as a scientific frame of reference than as a source of metaphor and analogy. The issue for the historian of ideas has increasingly become why Jung and Freud ever shared the same intellectual stable, since Jung emerged to be the heir of medieval

1. C.G.Jung 'The Collected Works' Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.29.

tradition, employing correspondence as much as causation in his methodology and preserving mind or spirit as an independent sphere of being.

The attempt to reconcile mind and matter, the spiritual and the physical, is also indicative of the Haldane family who worked as scientists within the British empirical tradition but looked to continental thinkers, Idealist and later Marxist, for a philosophical credo. This is the intellectual heritage that Mitchison put to work in her imaginative writing, deriving her imagery from the land forms, plants and animals of the natural world, but converting them into symbols, or mirrors, of the inner world. Thus when Jung speaks of the psyche as an introjection of the natural world and the spirits who were once believed to inhabit it, he is rationalising the outlook which leads Mitchison to speak, in a similar accent, of "the flora and fauna of the soul".¹

The idea of the unconscious mind, which antedates Jung in German Idealist and Romantic thought,² was accepted by Mitchison as imaginatively appropriate to her innate conceptions: it was, in her own phrase, "an idea which I had had myself".³ Jung's emphasis on the

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1. From Naomi Mitchison's unpublished African Notebooks, held in The Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.
 2. See, for example, Copleston's discussion of Eduard von Hartmann's The Philosophy of the Unconscious (1869) in Frederick Copleston A History of Philosophy (New York, 1963) Vol.7 Part II, pp.57-59.
 3. From Naomi Mitchison "The Archetypes of Scotland", an unpublished essay written in the nineteen forties. Held in The Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

unconscious as a dynamic process of adaptation and change seems calculated to appeal to the Bergsonian trend of Mitchison's thinking, all the more so since this line leads back to biology and the Haldane ethos.

.. We would probably do best to regard the psychic process simply as a life-process. In this way we enlarge the narrower concept of psychic energy into one of life energy. We thus gain the advantage of being able to follow quantitative relations beyond the narrow confines of the psychic into the sphere of biological functions in general. 1

Jung's original contribution to the idea of the unconscious, his exposition of its collective aspect, was also attractive to Mitchison since Jung was reacting against the same nineteenth-century individualism which she saw at the centre of a failed and crisis-ridden culture. The Jungian unconscious came as a justification after the fact for Mitchison's absorption in primitive culture and her belief in the relevance of such study to modern society.

Above all, Jung confirmed the excitement that Mitchison had experienced on her first "discovery" of history. The imaginative territories into which Mitchison had strayed, despite the rationalism of her upbringing, were redeemed from the charge of escapism or wish-fulfillment fantasy because of their claim to a place on the map of human psyche. Put briefly, Jung's view was that "the unconscious is in fact the condensation of the average run of historical experience."²

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1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.8, "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1960), p.17.
 2. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956), p.49.

If the imagination requires such justification, and Mitchison had never been completely confident that it does not, then this is certainly a better tack than the status of historical scholarship which she was prone to push in the twenties.

But Jung's historical reading of the psyche has as much poetry as rationality about it, as much self-exploration as objectivity.

The psyche is not of today; its ancestry goes back millions of years. Individual consciousness is only the flower and the fruit of a season, sprung from the perennial rhizome beneath the earth For the root matter is the mother of all things. 1

Mitchison's interaction with Jung, on this level, is more an encounter with an imaginative soul-mate than the unearthing of an intellectual authority, though both elements were involved. The Jungian unconscious provided the best medium for the links between past and present which she had always sought to explore. "By penetrating", Jung remarks in a typical aside, "into the blocked subterranean passages of our own psyches we grasp the living meaning of classical civilisation, and at the same time we establish a firm foothold outside our own culture from which alone it is possible to gain an objective knowledge of its foundation."² If Mitchison had read these words before writing The Corn King and the Spring Queen her method, which wavers between symbolism and empiricism, might have been that much more assured.

The activity of the unconscious mind or life energy is manifested,

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5, "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) xxiv.

2. Ibid., pp.4-5.

according to Jung, in dreams. This is partly an empirical standpoint since the evidence for Jung's theorising is drawn, in the first instance, from dreams; but Jung's interpretation of dreams consists in a fluctuating balance of psychological reductionism and symbolic extension. It is a combination of respect for the individualised multiplicity of reality with analysis of typical forms and structures, a mixture of the scientific outlook with an interest in cultural diversity more normally associated with the historian or artist. It is a tug-of-war between the Romantic and Classical attitudes which is conducted in Jung's writing through the changing definitions of the most problematic of his concepts, the archetype.

Jung's argument is that dreams and the symbolism of dreams conform to certain underlying matrices which are universal and inherited patterns and which "taken together constitute the structure of the unconscious."¹ At another point in the same volume, Jung speaks of archetypes as complexes "endowed with personality at the outset", which act as "personal agencies" and are "felt as actual experiences".² Examples of this category would include the mother archetype, the wise old man and the trickster, discussed in some of Jung's more popularised essays. However these papers ought to be taken as explorations into particular dream associations and cultural memories rather than as definitions, since in the course of his exposition of the mother archetype Jung is emphatic that an archetype is not "determined in regard to its content" but is "empty and purely formal".³

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.228.

2. Ibid., p.255.

3. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.9, part I, "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious" translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1959) p.79.

This is a contradiction for something purely formal cannot be experienced any more than an experience can be repeatable or identical, but Jung is attempting to combine the detached standpoint of the analyst with a sensitivity towards felt experience - a bridging operation vital to a thinker who bases his theories at least partly on his own inner awareness. This balancing act, which becomes increasingly precarious when further concepts and categories such as the "transformation archetypes" are introduced, brings Jung to the same sense of flux, of formless though form-creating energy, that I have argued is Mitchison's governing world view: archetypes dissolve into the faculty to create symbols and symbol complexes which, in their turn, display the mixture of continuity and change, sameness and difference, that typifies the creative energy itself.

When one carefully considers this accumulation of data, it begins to seem probable that an archetype in its quiescent, unprojected state has no exactly determinable form but is in itself an indefinite structure which can assume definite forms only in projection.

This seems to contradict the concept of a 'type'. If I am not mistaken, it not only seems but actually is a contradiction. Empirically speaking, we are dealing all the time with 'types', definite forms that can be named and distinguished. But as soon as you divest these types of the phenomenology presented by the case material, and try to examine them in relation to other archetypal forms, they branch out into such far-reaching ramifications in the history of symbols that one comes to the conclusion that the basic psychic elements are infinitely varied and ever changing, so as utterly to defy our powers of imagination. 1

For Jung a myth is a pattern of symbols which is either

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.9, part I, "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious" translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1959) p.70.

archetypal in itself or which gives indirect expression to an archetype or types. This points to a very positive evaluation of myth which contrasts specifically with Freud for whom myths were essentially infantile, a vehicle of fantasy provoked by repression. Jung takes the Idealist-romantic stance, typified by Schlegel in the nineteenth and Cassirer in the twentieth century, that myth embodies a non-causally directed mode of thought, a kind of non-discursive symbolic logic.¹ The function of myth in the psyche is a valuable one, since, in Jung, symbols are a form of communication from the unconscious, enabling the transfer of certain psychically charged contents to the conscious mind, thus furthering the integration of the personality by easing psychological conflict.

The function of myth within the psyche becomes for Jung a model of true imaginative creativity. He is distrustful of what he calls "the aesthetic attitude" which, he argues, "guards against any real participation, prevents one from being personally implicated, which is what a religious understanding of the problem would mean."² This statement comes as part of an attack on Nietzsche for what Jung asserts is his transfer of the antithesis between Apollo and Dionysius from the religious to the aesthetic realm, but it is reiterated by implication in every textual exegesis that Jung undertakes. All texts whether literary, historical or ritual are treated as secular scriptures

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1. Cassirer's central work The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, translated R. Manheim (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1953-57) is a major influence on Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957).
 2. C.G. Jung The Collected Works Vol. 6 "Psychological Types", translated R.F.C. Hull (London, 1971) p. 142.

bearing a message of integration for those who can interpret them aright. The role of the artist is to pass on the revelation - to reclothe the myth in contemporary dress.

Mitchison's model of creativity is similar to Jung's and, like his, derives from religion rather than contemporary art. Her fictions are intended as representations of reality, in whatever sense the term is understood, and as contributions to the symbolic processes of the psyche, communal and individual. It is interesting to speculate that their common need to justify the imagination by reference to some exterior reality, divine or psychic, is a legacy of the Evangelical Protestantism which colours both their backgrounds. However this quasi-religious outlook is more easily tenable by the psychoanalyst than the artist for it exposes itself to a determinist view of art hard to reconcile with individual creativity, and implies, moreover, assertions about the effect of literature on the reader and its role in society which will require qualification.

Whatever the appropriateness of this view of artist as a medium of revelation, it coincides, in Mitchison's work, with a compelling interest in religion as a psychological and social phenomenon. This too is a corollary of the Jungian logic, for since dreams, symbols and myths are psychically charged and possess a quasi-religious function, then, turning the equation on its head, religion ought to play a symbolic, therapeutic role in the economy of human culture. As Jung phrases the equivalence, "anything psychically powerful is inevitably called god."¹ Archetypes are therefore gods, or in the then

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.64.

fashionable language of comparative religion, "numinous": the language of religion is also the language of myth and equally translatable into psychological terms. When the tag of scientific verification is removed from Jung's package, the language of integration is revealed as a secular theology, a substitute for the language of salvation which has, according to Jung, been devalued by the growth of scientific culture.

Turning to the four novels which have been subjected to detailed scrutiny, it is worthwhile to reflect upon each as a stage in the development of Mitchison's Jungian style thinking. The situation of Erif and Tarrik in The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931), for instance, can quickly be related to the Jungian philosophy. Inner conflict, exteriorised in parental relationships and in the "marriage by rape" syndrome, causes a regression into the unconscious and a consequent dislocation from normal reality - a process of introversion which Jung mythologises as a return to the mother or the primal womb. In this condition, Jung asserts, the world of myth becomes the world of reality: the self is absorbed into the world of the archetypes.

Archetypes can, Jung argues, take the shape of a "mana" personality, such as a priest king or queen, or indeed of a god, like the fertility powers which Erif and Tarrik embody during the Marob rites. The risk is that when the conscious personality is in a state of regression, the archetype may possess the self and the amoral energy of the libido invade the moral realm. Rituals and propitiations are man's usual way of dealing with these demonic, brutish forces but, in Jung's analysis, "these applications of libido

require attention, concentration and inner discipline, thereby facilitating a further development of consciousness." "On the other hand", he continues, "incorrect performance and use of the rite may cause a retrograde movement of the libido, a regression which threatens to reproduce the earlier instinctual and unconscious state."¹

In this passage Jung is psychologising the same anthropological material, including The Golden Bough, to which Mitchison is responding in her Marob sequences. Moreover Mitchison's handling of Frazer is at points remarkably alike, as a comparison between Jung's comments above and the scene in which Erif reverts to an earlier form of the Harvest rite and kills her father shows. Similarities accumulate as Jung goes on to speak of "the perils of the soul" and "the splitting of the self" which result from misdirected performance. It is clear in these terms why the Marob festivals bring Erif and Tarrik's crisis to an individual and communal head.

A web of connections could be sketched with ramifications in anthropology, psychology and literature, but at the centre of the web is the concept of initiation. For Jung initiation gives social form to an inner psychic transformation or transferral of energy from the unconscious to consciousness; it is analogous to metamorphosis in nature but in man the process is symbolised and placed in a ritual or dramatic setting.

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.169.

All primitive groups and tribes that are in any way organised have their rites of initiation, often very highly developed, which play an extraordinarily important part in their social and religious life. Through these ceremonies boys are made men, and girls women. The Kavirondos stigmatise those who do not submit to circumcision and excision as 'animals'. This shows that the initiation ceremonies are a magical means of leading man from the animal state to the human state. They are clearly transformation mysteries of the greatest spiritual significance. 1

The psychic process of initiation is the familiar one of regression into the unconscious and subsequent reintegration with the personality.

Mitchison employs the same model of cultural emergence from the animal or unconscious to the human state, and governing her presentation of character, especially the principal figures, is the same biopsychical concept of personality as an organic form, metamorphosed through certain life stages, beginning with birth and culminating in death. Furthermore, the psychological movement of descent and ascent, which is ritualised and socialised as an initiation, is also the fundamental movement of the Romance form.

It was this basic similarity that enabled Jessie Weston to trace the origin of Romance from fertility cults of the Frazerian, year-king variety, through the mystery religions and their initiations to Arthurian Romance. However, although Jung would value this approach, he would have been unlikely to devise it, since he is only indirectly interested in initiations as exemplifying the same psychic pattern

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.7 "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1953) pp.228-229.

that he has already identified in dreams. Dreaming involves a descent into the unconscious, the generation of symbols and a subsequent awakening or return to consciousness, the whole experience resulting in an alteration of the self or a shifting of the balance between unconscious energy and conscious personality. Thus dream fantasies, particularly in a sustained series, accomplish on the psychic level what initiations achieve on the social.

The unconscious contents are, in the first instance, things belonging to the personal sphere

Subsequently fantasies from the impersonal unconscious develop, containing essentially collective symbols ... These fantasies are not so wild and unregulated as a naive intelligence might think; they pursue definite, unconscious lines of direction which converge upon a definite goal. We could most fittingly describe these later series of fantasies as processes of initiation, since these form the closest analogy. 1

Is the Romance, then, a kind of literary dreaming in which the dreamed self is the hero or heroine, and the dreaming self either the author as creator or the reader as interpreter and recreator? The analogy is attractive but extremely complex to evaluate. In Jung's hands it is the corollary of a functional, indeed reductionist view of literature. Often in dream exegesis, he turns to Romance or Romance type material:² the literary form, he implies, is designed in exactly the same way as the dream and its importance, its purpose, lies in that element of archetypical design rather than in the so-called contingent factors of authorship and historical or social

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.7 "Two Essays on Analytical Psychology", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1953) p.228.

2. Longfellow's "Hiawatha", for example, is extensively analysed in "Symbols of Transformation", Volume Five of The Collected Works.

context. Mitchison, too, inclines towards such a functional view of literature, and she provides, through Erif's catalepsis in The Corn King, a Romance within the Romance, in the shape of a dream fantasy concerning a crucified god and a serpent metamorphosed from the heroine, who is in this case the dreamer.

But the use of this device is hedged about with difficulties. The symbols of the putative myth are not straightforwardly universal, and Mitchison's use of them appears as a failure of literary tact, presuming on the reader's ability and willingness to become an interpreter and recreator. The literary context makes different demands on the material from the ritual or religious, and cannot be dismissed as secondary or incidental.

Continuing in pursuit of analogies, attention might be focussed on the kind of symbols that come into play in the movement of ascent or reintegration, which Mitchison foreshortens and compresses in The Corn King. "The finest of all symbols of the libido", writes Jung, "is the human figure, conceived as a demon or hero."¹ The hero is the symbol of the integrated or individuated self, of culture and civilisation, as opposed to the animal and natural part of man which is more likely to issue in theriomorphic symbolism; he represents man's drive towards consciousness and selfhood and his longing for immortality. In Jung's summary, "The cultural point of view gives man a meaning apart from the mass, and this, in the course of

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.171.

centuries led to the development of personality and the cult of the hero."¹

In a sense this is yet another commentary on the model of cultural emergence favoured by Gerald Heard and put to work by Mitchison in 'The Corn King'. However the Jungian version is the superior one because it offers a more coherent system of relationships between the personal and the social, the historical and the universal, and between the Romance quest and philosophical abstraction than the one Mitchison had constructed for herself. There are sources of unity in the Jungian system towards which Mitchison is feeling her way but which remain untapped in the novel. Kleomenes is the heroic figure who is to function for Marob, through its king and queen, as an embodiment of the libido and a symbol of integration. This is the novel's logical culmination, and Kleomenes' transfiguration ought to supply the reader with a moment of revelation, an epiphany, which will allow him retrospectively and prospectively to gather the novel up into the imaginative whole that it is striving unsuccessfully to become.

This failure is bound up with Mitchison's ambivalent attitude towards the motif of sacrifice which is central to the thematic structure of 'The Corn King'. The hero must, in Jung's interpretation of Romance, descend into the underworld of the unconscious and confront the demonic elemental force of the mother, in order to regain in

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.177.

enhanced form the world of light or consciousness; only through this act of sacrifice, this death and rebirth of awareness, can true selfhood be attained. The same pattern is carried over into the mystery religions, and into Christianity at whose heart is a dying and rising god: "this was the real purpose of all the mystery religions," pronounces Jung, "they created symbols of death and rebirth."¹ Here Jung acknowledges a debt to Frazer, but he is actually turning Frazer upside down, since his focal reference is not the natural, cyclical order on which Frazer argues the mystery rituals were based, but the inner self: in Jung the world of Frazer's nature has become the world of the unconscious.

Kleomenes, then, is a hero, mystery god, and Christ-surrogate, and his sacrificial death is the nodal event towards which the mythopoeic dimension of the novel moves and from which it retrospectively gains its justification. At the vital moment, however, Mitchison distances herself from the whole affair, by demythologising and moralising it, and by denying it any resonance other than that lent it by the emotions and perceptions of all the characters except the most crucial person, Erif herself. The natural Romance development of the novel is stymied by a crude juxtaposition of the empirical and the fantastic, leaving Kleomenes' death, as indirectly presented, an insufficient vehicle for the thematic weight placed upon it.

A loss of literary patience is involved in this evasion, and a

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.415 note.

confusion about the universality of symbols, generated by Mitchison's wholesale adoption of The Golden Bough into literary tradition; but, in the overall growth of Mitchison's Romance art, her loss of nerve in The Corn King is primarily a result of her inability, at that time, to reconcile her Freudian rationalism concerning religious motifs with her nascent, Jungian reconstruction of religion. This is the same conflict of the rational and the irrational that remains unresolved in the split between the unconscious and impersonal reintegration of Erif, and the morally conscious discoveries of Tarrik - the salvation one might hazard, of the anima and animus sides of the psyche. To Freud the desire for sacrifice was tied up with infantile fantasies of blood and propitiation, with repression and with the death instinct. For Jung, by contrast, sacrifice and death are not the antitheses of eros or the will to life but an integral part of the life process which consists in a continual cycle of extinction and rebirth. The growth of personality depends on an acceptance of this process, and therefore of sacrifice, the death of self.

The conflict between rationalism and the religious imagination persists in Mitchison's fiction throughout the thirties but is eased in The Bull Calves (1947) and the later Romances. There is no doubt that Mitchison's conscious coming to grips with Jung in the nineteen forties furthered this reconciliation, and it is his understanding of sacrifice that she carries forward into her later work.

The mind shies away, but life wants to flow down into the depths. Fate itself seems to preserve us from this, because each of us has a tendency to become an immovable pillar of the past. Nevertheless, the daemon throws us down, makes us traitors to our ideals and cherished convictions - traitors to the

selves we thought we were. That is an unmitigated catastrophe, because it is an unwilling sacrifice. Things go very differently when the sacrifice is a voluntary one. Then it is no longer an overthrow, a "transvaluation of values," the destruction of all that we held sacred, but transformation and conservation. Everything young grows old, all beauty fades, all heat cools, all brightness dims, and every truth becomes stale and trite. For all these things have taken on shape, and all shapes are worn thin by the working of time; they age, sicken, crumble to dust - unless they change, but change they can, for the invisible spark that generated them is potent enough for infinite generation. No one should deny the danger of the descent, but it can be risked. No one need risk it, but it is certain that some one will. And let those who go down the sunset way do so with open eyes, for it is a sacrifice which daunts even the gods. Yet every descent is followed by an ascent; the vanishing shapes are shaped anew, and a truth is valid in the end only if it suffers change and bears new witness in new images, in new tongues, like a new wine that is put into new bottles. 1

In The Corn King and the Spring Queen the Jungian idea of the unconscious and archetypal symbolism are present in an early and relatively unsophisticated form. By the nineteen thirties Mitchison's attention had shifted to the operation of the unconscious in society, but here again she was thinking in the Jungian mould. In the progress from magic to religion Jung detects a continuity of function, of unconscious propitiation and protection, and like Mitchison, he carries this progression into politics, the ideologies of which are equally "methods of salvation and propitiation".² This translation of politics

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.357.

2. Ibid., p.156.

and religion into the common psychological factor is the theme of Mitchison's "thirties" novels, We Have Been Warned (1935) and Blood of the Martyrs (1939)

Such analysis opens up the way to the sweeping psychic interpretations of history, beloved of psychoanalytical schools of thought. The fascist ideologies of the thirties are seen by Jung as the invasion of the European psyche by Wotan, the consuming mother goddess, hungry for blood and sacrifice. This is a threat that he sees as endemic in modern scientific culture because the presumption of the ego to control the unconscious provokes a terrible backlash of archetype possession: the heritage of European nineteenth-century, liberal and individualist culture is one of collapse and catastrophe.

In We Have Been Warned the influence of Jung is evident in the "Mass Observation" style attempt to develop a "symbiology of the unconscious" for the contemporary era. Hence Mitchison's interest in the motif of conflagration and judgement, which is foreshadowed by the Reichstag fire and envisioned prophetically in the Romance or dream ending of the novel - the horrors of hell invade the realm of ordinary experience. For Jung the judgement motif, as illustrated within Christian tradition, is a classic example of a transformation archetype.

The fantasy of world conflagration, of the cataclysmic end of the world in general, is the projected primordial image of the great transformation, the enantiodromia of life into death The image of the consuming change that dissolves the phenomenal world of individual psychic existence originates in the unconscious and appears before the conscious mind in dreams and shadowy premonitions . 1

1. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation", translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.438.

Of course this impression of massive upheaval is exactly what Mitchison fails to achieve despite her theoretical commitment to the transformation of society; her imaginative conception remains firmly planted in the stable, if threatened, world of middle-class values. Formal similarities, even those assigned archetypal status, are of only minimal relevance if not accompanied by individual artistic achievement.

In Blood of the Martyrs the same psychoanalytical analysis of society is operative but with significantly dissimilar emphasis. Having favoured in The Corn King the unconscious side of the Jungian polarity as a liberating dynamic within the self and society, Mitchison swings round in this later novel to stress the need for the conscious, moral realisation of the irrational forces in human life. This shift of emphasis has positive results in that it prepares the ground for the synthesis of The Bull Calves and unifies, through its singlemindedness, The Blood of the Martyrs as a literary artefact. But the moralisation of the Romance motifs also limits the scope of the novel, nudging it in the direction of allegory.

The penetration of the individual psyche attained, albeit in a flawed form, in The Corn King is lacking in the later novel because Mitchison curbs her bold and expansive use of mythological symbolism and in the process diminishes her imaginative conception of the unconscious. It is an irony of the rationalist agnostic position that concern about a very real manifestation of the power of evil in contemporary society should provoke it into such a denial of the active existence of evil as anything other than the absence of moral awareness.

Even in The Corn King and The Bull Calves¹, where Mitchison shares Jung's sense of the ambiguity of the unconscious, evil is never taken wholly seriously. There are points in Jung's writing when he seems to turn deliberately towards the rational moralists with a face full of Puckish impudence.

For life in itself is not something good; it is more than that, it is also evil. In that the anima wishes life it wishes good and bad. In the domain of elfin being, these categories do not exist. Not only the bodily but the psychic life as well, has the impudence to get along without current morality - often much better so - and even to become healthier and more beautiful without it. 1

In the post-war years, The Bull Calves (1947) consciously evokes the Jungian theme of integration and reconciliation between the unconscious and the conscious personality. Like Jung, Mitchison employs the religious model of salvation in order to express a secular concept of self-fulfillment in which man is both the redeemer and the one to be redeemed.² Integration is achieved through the conscious realisation of the archetypes - the inner forces of all human existence - by means of an attentive listening to and interpretation of the symbolic language of the unconscious. The "passing over" of an archetype in this way from darkness to awareness is, suggests Jung, "felt as an illumination, a revelation, or a 'saving idea' ".³

1. C.G.Jung The Integration of the Personality, translated S.M.Dell (London, 1940) p.77.

2. Ibid., p.237.

3. C.G.Jung The Collected Works Vol.5 "Symbols of Transformation" translated R.F.C.Hull (London, 1956) p.294.

The Jungian concepts of the anima and animus, the female and male aspects of the psyche, are also used by Mitchison, as an analytical and imaginative vehicle for a more penetrating presentation of individual psychological realism. However, just as in the Jungian scheme the personal unconscious is but a veil drawn over the numinous contents of the impersonal unconscious, so in The Bull Calves the anima and animus are used not only as elements of the individual psyche but as symbols of our universal condition, acting out beneath the level of the realistic plot an intense, dreamlike drama in which the reader is both spectator and participant.

The symbolic nuances which offer the reader a point of entry into the inner significance of the tale draw their resonance from Mitchison's own introspection and self-awareness, from the inspiration of the Romantic self, but they are objectified in the verbal structure of the novel. Language, imagery, historical setting and religious and philosophical ideas, fashioned into a harmonious symbolic reality, ensure not only the accessibility of the symbolic revelations but their freedom from any predetermined orthodoxy of interpretation.

The influence of Jung on Mitchison in the post-war years, however, extends beyond the mythopoeic response of The Bull Calves into a general psychoanalytical view of Scottish culture, similar to her understanding of Germany in the thirties. The problem is stated as, "an emptying of the pre-conscious and unconscious by our rational thought and way of life, especially by Protestantism rationalised as the philosophy of capitalism." This, according to Mitchison, has meant "not only the casting down of images, Popish or pre-Christian, but

also the breaking of the cake of custom, the pattern of the community, the traditions and rites which held us together."¹ Repression leads directly to a reaction by the denied, irrational self.

The absence of the traditional rites and symbols leaves a state of emptiness and renders the necessary process of integration - the mediation between conscious and unconscious - difficult for the individual in Scotland today. This deprives the Highlanders - Scots - of a necessary background of courage and confidence and leaves them open to the dark unconscious. 2

The same case is put more evocatively in "The Cleansing of the Knife".

They have dowsed the friendly light,
The Mass, the carols, the Harvest Home,
Instead
The witch, the warning, the punishment, the Sight:³

It is to this problem, conceptualised in such explicitly Jungian fashion, that Mitchison addresses herself in The Bull Calves, aiming to recreate through symbolic story-making a sense of cohesive national consciousness and pride, which will integrate the pre-conscious dimension of human nature into the quest for justice and reconciliation. What Mitchison does not take into sufficient account in these aims is that her symbolic vehicle is a literary artefact, designed, unlike ritual or drama, for the individual reader, on whose interpretative and recreative participation the translation of the text into literary or other experience is dependent.

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1. From Naomi Mitchison 'The Archetypes of Scotland' an unpublished essay written in the nineteen forties.
 2. Ibid.,
 3. Naomi Mitchison The Cleansing of the Knife and other poems (Edinburgh, 1978) p.42.

The breadth of this gap between the individual, and philosophical or psychological abstraction, leads Mitchison in her fiction to provide the reader with a concrete portrait of a community that embodies, especially in heightened or ritual sequences, the corporate values lacking in contemporary society. Marob is the prototype of these communities of the imagination, into which the reader can enter by virtue of his involvement in the symbolic reality of the novel.

However in The Bull Calves this aspect of Mitchison's thinking is underplayed, and the integrated community that Kirstie and William aim to create through their management of the Borlum estate takes second place to the more widely representative but less concrete idea of a united Scotland, symbolised by the Gleneagles household. This omission throws an interesting light on the kind of sustained artistic discipline that went into the making of the novel, since at this time the development of the Carradale community was a burning personal issue for Mitchison: the novel maintains the distinction between art and reality that the poetry of the same period often blurs.

The longing for a communal unity transcending individualism belongs to a major strand in Mitchison's fiction which runs directly back to James Frazer, a second interpreter of myth whose influence on the young writer was definitive. The Frazerian motif of the king who dies for his people is, in Mitchison's fiction, the myth of true community which, though parallel to the cyclical continuity of nature, is yet separated from it by the moral awareness, exemplified pre-eminently in man's capacity for self-sacrifice, that divides culture from nature, the world of the unconscious from human consciousness. The Jacobite legend is only significant for Scotland because, in the

teeth of the facts of history, Prince Charles has become the Year King and so a symbol of communal and national aspiration.

It is not stating the case too strongly to say that Mitchison's entire sense of society is mediated through Frazer's The Golden Bough and his intuition of the social unconscious. This is not social realism in the generally accepted meaning of the term but the kind of communal imagination which fuses the endless illustrations and examples of Frazer's masterpiece into a vision of human nature. The Frazerian influence on Mitchison is seen in her treatment of the sacred union of Erif Der and Kleomenes in The Corn King, and the marriage of Kirstie and William in The Bull Calves. The motif has a long symbolic ancestry stretching back through the mystery cults to fertility religion. For Jung it is indicative of the conjunction of opposites, the combination of the anima and animus aspects of the psyche, but for Mitchison it is also a social symbol: the "marriage" of Kleomenes and Erif leads to the restored Marob of the epilogue, while the intervention of Duncan Forbes, the year king of the future, extends the reconciliation attained by Kirstie and William to the Gleneagles household, whose end-state is in turn symbolic of a restored national order. Mitchison's individual realism always has representative overtones, dovetailing her Jungian attempt to penetrate the collective by way of the personal with her Frazerian perception of social symbolism.

Mitchison's use of the Frazerian year king in his anthropological, religious and political guises also highlights the paradoxical relation to history which seems inherent in her thought. The denial

to Scotland of her symbolic heritage, not least its kings and queens, is ascribed by Mitchison to "Protestantism rationalised as the philosophy of capitalism"; it is also the result of "English imperialism".¹ The "king who dies" often comes to the fore, according to Mitchison, among a conquered people and "at some critical moment" to revive the repressed spirit of tribal or national community, but the impulse to create such a figurehead derives from an ahistorical, though historically conditioned, source of renewal. History is the subject matter of Mitchison's historical Romances but it is also the enemy of faith, hope, love and community; it is a catalogue of the successes of the unrighteous which is evoked only to be ultimately transcended.

Historical defeat issuing in symbolic triumph is the thread which unites first century B.C. Gauls; Spartan revolutionaries; working-class socialists; early Christians in Rome; Scottish nationalists; and, in the later fiction, African freedom-fighters. The typology of the Romance form is, Northrop Frye argues, not so much a denial as an interpretation of history, a vision of historical process: "it insists that for all the chaos and waste in human effort, nevertheless historical events, ar at least some of them, are going somewhere and meaning something."² Without straying into the philosophy of history, it is apparent that Mitchison uses the Frazerian year king as such a type, and that, implied by her presentation of symbolic rebirth, is a

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1. From Naomi Mitchison 'The Archetypes of Scotland', an unpublished essay written in the nineteen forties.
 2. Northrop Frye Creation and Recreation (Toronto and London, 1980) p.60.

faith in the evolutionary life force that manifests itself through the unconscious. Whether this is the same thing as Frye's "historical process" is another matter; what is certain is that the imagination can within its own constructs transcend the paradoxes of history, and that Mitchison's philosophical and emotional premises predispose her towards such fictional reconciliation.

Frazer's seasonal and social interpretation of myth also offers some interesting points of contact with literary theory. His derivation of myth from seasonal ritual suggested the parallel derivation of Romance from ritual, since similar fertility motifs were to be found in both. Northrop Frye has drawn attention to the frequent occurrence of ritual scenes in Romance and the way in which this reflects the heightened or ritualised mode of action that pervades the genre.¹ Could Romance be a kind of private, interiorised ritual? Of course Mitchison's use of ritual sequences within The Corn King, Blood of the Martyrs and The Bull Calves, does not stem from her allegiance to a secret fertility cult; it is a highly conscious and personal form of symbolism which may, however, have wider social and imaginative implications.

The question at stake is less a profound, and therefore imponderable, one as to the nature of society and the imagination, than a critical one as to whether the usefulness and suggestiveness of the ritual analogy is outweighed by the radical differences in social

1. Northrop Frye The Secular Scripture (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1976) p.56.

context, purposes and expectations between the modern novel and a religious rite. Frye takes such analogies very seriously indeed but for him all routes, literary or social, lead back to the structures of the one governing imaginative faculty. That there are formal continuities from ritual through drama to the structures of prose fiction is hard to deny, but continuity of function is a more speculative matter, if in many ways a more important one. Much depends on the individual author concerned and in Mitchison's case the ritual and dramatic metaphors are helpful, not just because of her conscious interest in anthropological theory, but because of her preference as a prose writer for dramatic or ritual motifs - the sacrifice of tragedy, the frustrated love affair, the marriage and social reintegration of comedy.

The role that the idea of myth plays in Mitchison's fiction might be further clarified if a definitive interpreter of myth who had little or no conscious influence on Mitchison were brought into consideration. Such a figure is Levi-Strauss. The structuralist reading of myth, now largely associated with Levi-Strauss, stretches back through the anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown to the social philosophy of Emile Durkheim whose influence is evident in The Corn King. Although this tradition has a strong social emphasis, particularly in its anthropological adherents, it treats myth as a reflection of the universal structures of the human mind. The germ of this approach is already contained in Durkheim's characterisation of rituals and their derivative myths as "collective representations", but it is refined in the work of Levi-Strauss into a sophisticated analytical tool, uncovering in mythic and symbolic texts an underlying proto-Aristotelian

logic.¹

There is no evidence that Mitchison has been either directly or indirectly affected by the structuralist interpretation of myth but, had she encountered Levi-Strauss' work at a formative stage, it is not inconceivable that he would have contributed to the germination of her art in the same way that Jung and Frazer have done. An appreciation of the logical content of symbolic narratives might have checked the tendency in Mitchison's writing to treat myth as an expression of the purely irrational side of the psyche as opposed to the abstract critical faculty. This in turn might have eased the antithesis of the rational and the irrational that dogs the structure of her early fiction. Ideas and thought structures are crucial to the way in which Mitchison builds a house of fiction.

But external systems of thought do not provide a canon of interpretation for Mitchison's Romances, whatever their source. This is partly a pragmatic matter in that it is extremely hard to isolate a collection of ideas, arranged with any structural symmetry from a written text. Neither Frazer, Jung or Levi-Strauss is a strictly systematic thinker; certain interpretative models receive emphasis in their writing but they are applied to any individual exegesis with a subtle mixture of sameness and difference, established analysis and fresh insight. The writer or critic who falls under the spell of these thinkers in his or her own work must constantly be selecting and

1. See Claude Levi-Strauss "The Story of Osdiwal" translated Nicholas Mann in Edmund Leach (ed.) The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism (London, 1967), for a brief, accessible example of Strauss' approach.

re-emphasising: such is the way that creative minds and texts interact.

Yet something more fundamental divides Mitchison the writer and Jung the thinker. The relationship between "The Bull Calves" and Jung's "The Integration of the Personality" (1940) is not so much the alignment of a work of literature with a theoretical treatise, as the adoption of that treatise into literary tradition. This is what happened wholesale to "The Golden Bough" and it is what Mitchison achieves for Jung within the terms of her own fiction. Grammars of the intellect, to use a phrase of Frye's, become grammars of the imagination, and ideas are transmuted into symbolic vehicles.

When external concepts are not integrated into the imaginative construction of a novel they intrude, as they do when one of Mitchison's characters dons the rationalist mantle of their creator. In each novel there is at least one figure who from time to time becomes a theologian, philosopher, psychoanalyst, economic historian or sociologist. This often pointed commentary indicates a desire to convert intellectual implications into expositions, an unwillingness to let the imagination speak for itself, and a corresponding need to support symbolic forays with the logistics of rationalism.

But these blemishes are of the surface rather than the substance of Mitchison's fiction, which deploys ideas as a natural element of its imaginative conception, blending them into the linguistic fabric of the individual work. This is the alchemy of the philosophic Romance: Mitchison accepts Frazer's interpretation of primitive myth as an articulation of the seasonal cycle and its existential

importance to human society, and Jung's interpretation of primitive myth as a drama of the unconscious mind and the individual self; combines them; converts them into literary currency; and uses them metaphorically as her own representation of what is crucial in human existence. These ideas, contained in the comprehensive term myth, constitute focal reference points on a broad canvas; their position in the fictional scheme is itself an emotional and moral value judgement.

Mitchison's error, at junctures within her novels, and extensively in her critical view of her fiction, is to submit to the authority of the ideas that she has so boldly marshalled for her artistic purposes. She is liable to justify her art by the assertion that it will appeal to the Jungian archetypes or arouse a latent Frazerian communality. There can be no such direct crossover from the naturalistic world to the fictional heterocosm or in the reverse direction, although the impulse to make such a connection throws into relief both some of the springs of Mitchison's literary practice, particularly her desire to turn the Romance into a religious myth for the twentieth-century, and the nature of the Romance mode itself.

Mitchison shares with the major modernist writers of the early twentieth century a debt to the founding fathers of modern anthropology and psychoanalysis, but the use to which she put their ideas is significantly dissimilar. Brought up in the late-Victorian and Edwardian heyday of popular literature, she did not, like Yeats or Lawrence, welcome the ideas of the new thinkers as a source of secret knowledge to be incorporated in complex and oblique literary artefacts,

that would resist the vulgarisation of the industrial age by cultivating an aristocracy of perception and sensibility. Mitchison's preference for the Romance mode, the adventure or love story, is indicative of her desire to integrate the new knowledge into accepted and widely distributed literary forms.

But this effort to democratise sensibility, and thus ally her art with what she conceives to be the movement of history or progress, tempts Mitchison, paradoxically, to infringe on the freedom of the reader to respond to her fictional world as language and the imagination suggest. Talk of the writer as mythmaker often arises from the Romantic tendency to discover a godhead within the self, but Mitchison is inclined to accept her literary work as a drama of Jungian redemption, generated by psychic absolutes that govern not just the author's subjective inspiration but the reader's reaction. This is too simplistic a view of literature since it neglects the context of literary tradition in which the interaction between author, text and reader occurs. It is to convert literature into religion and the artist into a theologian. The flaws in Mitchison's fiction such as the conclusion of The Corn King and the muddles of We Have Been Warned result, at least partly, from the rather naive expectation that the reader will accord the same value to Mitchison's creed of secular salvation as she does herself. The writer can only, through the indirections of art, create a suspension of disbelief.

At the same time, there is an appeal in the Romance form to inner or secret knowledge, to tacit meanings and emotions which ought not to be affronted by explicit definition or categorisation. The language

of the Romance is poetic and indirect, pointing within itself to emotions which relate to the introspection and self-awareness of the author but which must be reinterpreted and recreated by the reader who is willing and able to explore the symbolic reality of the fictional world. There is an elusive subtlety in this process that defies literary criticism to be anything other than one more recreative response, and Mitchison betrays an impatience with subtlety and indirection: it smacks of privilege and an inherited cultural legacy. That, along with an innate, rationalist tendency towards universal classification, is what causes her to misjudge her own very personal transformation of the ideas of Frazer and Jung into literary symbols.

The Romance then is a secular scripture, a symbolic code containing esoteric meanings, but the code has no set transcriptions other than those created by the author and reader operating jointly within the evolving medium of literary tradition. There is no simple way of assessing to what extent Mitchison's employment of anthropological symbolism is subjective and to what extent representative. Each novel must be subject to the kind of detailed criticism already attempted and the relationship of Mitchison's symbolic methods to the literary and social context carefully gauged. The greatest contribution that a general theory of literature, such as Northrop Frye's, can make to this business of detailed evaluation is to provide a geography of literary tradition in which the features most relevant to the work in hand can be identified, and Frye's theory of modes and genres supplies just such a map.

The Romance mode is Mitchison's true vocation as a writer but the resolved method of "The Bull Calves" and the later Romances is a hard won achievement. Major novels such as "The Corn King and the Spring Queen" suffer from a mixing of modes, in this instance of tragic realism with Romance idealism; they are flawed, though courageous, attempts to make a comprehensive or epic statement, a synthesis of different ways of looking at the world; but the epiphanies that should transform individual experience into a corporate vision are mishandled. Mitchison's growth as a writer fostered a greater poise and professionalism and, behind the literary craft of forms and structures, an acceptance of her own imaginative gifts and intellectual heritage, a gradual process of self-discovery, obtained through the pressures of experience, and the continuing effort of literary reflection and construction.

In Mitchison's hands, the Romance draws near to Comedy. As Frye points out the two modes share many motifs, such as the overcoming of potentially tragic complications, the reunion of lost lovers and the reintegration of disrupted family relationships; the main distinction is one of tone. Comedy involves a this-worldly acceptance of man's moral and social nature that undercuts the Romance concern with visions of the ideally good or demonically evil. This thematic difference is associated by Frye with a structural contrast between the cyclical movement of comedy and the descent and ascent structure of Romance, which swings between the heavenly and hellish poles of an essentially utopianic imagination.

The thematic tension between Romance and Comedy in Mitchison's

work is also the conflict of the social and personal aspects of her thought. The mood of communal celebration that she associates with Frazer is not sufficient for the self-aware individual, but the personal descent and discovery of the Jungian philosophy is a sterile exercise unless it leads back to the community and a more-than-individual integration. Wishing to move beyond tragic realism, Mitchison is caught, in the major fictions, between comic affirmation and a Romance conception of possible worlds, transcending the ambiguities and compromises of the comic universe. Only in The Bull Calves and the later novels does she effect an assured blend of the Romance and Comic moods. The idealism of Romance, Mitchison suggests, cannot be pushed too far in a world of human incongruity and frailty - a world moreover which contains its own absolutes in the organic cycle of life and death.

The transition between the major fictions and the later Romances is conveniently signposted by the short novel To the Chapel Perilous (1955), which is a thorough redefinition of Mitchison's relationship to myth and literary tradition. Unlike the novels which advance a comprehensive credo, To the Chapel Perilous is limited in scope, concentrating on a single theme and working within a unified literary mode or style. With this short piece a new objectivity and detachment enters Mitchison's work; there is a surrender of the authorial inclination to establish meanings by unilateral fiat, and a submission to the discipline and limitations of the literary craft. There is loss as well as gain in this transition, for the ambition to create a modern "myth" from the materials of personal vision was a noble if hazardous one, and only in The Memoirs of a Spacewoman (1962)

among these slighter books does the alchemy of the Romance imagination function with its former intensity.

For the purposes of The Chapel, Mitchison presupposes the complete structure of the Arthurian Grail legends as preserved within literary tradition, but distances herself from it with a humorous, sceptical and reductive attitude which constitutes the viewpoint of the main characters - two journalists covering the "quest" story for Dark Age Britain's two leading dailies, "The Camelot Chronicle" and "The Northern Pict". The tone of the narrative, which is both comic, in line with the novel's typical portrayal of character, and matter-of-fact as befits the journalistic subject, unites style and theme, since it expresses in linguistic form those facets of modern consciousness which cut us off from any direct or simple understanding of stories that are held to have been religiously significant and socially functional in past ages.

Mitchison's acceptance of the form of the Grail legends as giving shape, however obliquely, to her own narrative and thematic structure reflects her literary^{*} conservatism, but she does not presume any inherent meaningfulness for the stories. Rather, while playing on the background of conventional meanings, she reinterprets and recreates the Grail motifs within her literary heterocosm. The grail is simply "that which is quested for in human life", and the onus for identifying the nature of the goal is thrown back on the individual searchers by the mystic, allusive figure of the hermit, who mirrors the human soul, suggesting only what the questers can already discover within themselves. Mitchison's sole claim is that there must be a quest whether it is

merely a journalistic search for facts (truth being more elusive); a knightly pursuit of fame, booty and position; or a high and holy quest for the mysteries of beauty, truth and goodness. But the actual significance of the quest motif is apparent only at that point at which human beings enter the pattern and render it existentially operative.

In the novel this transformation or epiphany is the discovery by Lienors and Dalyn of their love for each other, and their departure for their own personal Avalon which is a characteristically Mitchisonian blend of the Romantic "green-world" ideal with comic down-to-earthness.

As the first grass blades began to push through the dry misery of the waste land, a bird appeared from nowhere, in the way small birds do when a person is looking for something else. Suddenly the bird is there. And by the time the sight of the bird, so attractively balancing itself above the newly bubbling spring, has been taken into the mind and there recorded, other things have had time to happen. There are flowers breaking through among the grass; the early spikes of snowdrops, a small smear of white between the green, are swelling and bending over into open petticoats, and after them the whole of spring rushing on and summer after it, a whirl of butterflies, a splashing of fish, a courting of birds. The land is no longer waste. 'Yes, thought the hermit, the quest seems to be going well.'

(To the Chapel Perilous p.172)

So deceptively simple and restrained, after all the striving and complex architectonics of the major novels, are Mitchison's final thoughts on the tragic agonies of the modernist consciousness.

'To the Chapel Perilous epitomises several qualities which distinguish Mitchison's later fiction. Foremost among these is the assurance and professionalism of the style which sustains a unique

serio-comic tone from start to finish without disharmony. It is a syntactically lucid prose that contains within its apparent straightforwardness oblique resonances. The language combines objectivity and poetic innerness, the colloquial and the heightened, the prose of fact and the poetry of the senses and emotional suggestion, in a stylistic unity that Mitchison was to build on and develop in her later writing. The same respect for the medium of communication also dictates Mitchison's treatment of the Arthurian literary tradition which is comparable to her later handling of the Cleopatra myth, the adventure story, or the conventions of science fiction. While accepting the resources of form and established significance provided by the literary tradition, she distances herself from them in order to allow a contemporary moral or existential recreation of the inherited patterns.

By working within the discipline of language and the limitations and possibilities of literary tradition, Mitchison paves the way for that interaction between the intentions of the author, the common ground of tradition, and the interpretative function of the reader, which is the essence of the literary process. The need to insist on a general significance is absent in these later fictions; instead there is an acknowledgement that the endeavour of fictional creation is an individual one, yielding a primarily personal vision which can yet, because of the ability of artistically ordered symbolic language to evoke inherited and suggest fresh meanings, provoke far-reaching social and imaginative associations. Whereas the four large novels grow fat on mythic and monumental claims, while pulling simultaneously in the contradictory directions of dreamlike descents into the personal

psyche and affirmations of social Utopias, To the Chapel Perilous is the first in a line of carefully crafted novels whose personal obliquity, if not eccentricity, constantly impinges on wider concerns.

In The Chapel one can detect a rhythm of rational distance giving way finally, with honour and integrity, to emotional and existential acceptance, the quality of the one depending on the sincerity of the other. This pattern is the key to the succeeding decade of Mitchison's writing which encompasses both the rational, global perspectives of science fiction and the impassioned partisanship of a committed Euro-African.

EPILOGUE

"Into All the World."

The themes of reconciliation and integration which Naomi Mitchison formulated in The Bull Calves (1947) are carried forward into the succeeding decades of her work. The Land the Ravens Found, a short novel of 1955, begins in the tribal and racial conflict of tenth century Scotland, but ends in the fiercely independent, though cooperative, society of the newly colonised Iceland. It traces the progress from violence to a moral yet still dynamic outlook: Gael and Viking, conquered and conquerors, share in an ongoing reconciliation of opposites. Former antagonisms such as the clash of paganism with Christianity or long-standing family feuds are not simplistically left behind in the old land, but are worked through in the context of a progressive, developing society.

For Mitchison this brief, carefully written novel is a blending of old and new interests. As early as 1921 she had attempted a novel about "Aud the Northerner", the central character of The Land the Ravens Found; ¹ the Norse sagas were one of the earliest influences on Mitchison's historical writing, the Vikings one of the ancient peoples which engaged her imagination most vividly, not least because of the independence and resources of their womenfolk. ² At the same

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1. "The Story of Aud the Northerner", an unfinished fragment in a notebook dated 1921-1922, held in The Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.
 2. The Viking theme stretches from When the Bough Breaks (London, 1923) to The Swan's Road (London, 1954).

time, 'The Land the Ravens Found' reflects Mitchison's contemporary commitment to world peace and her involvement in the Authors' World Peace Association which sought to narrow the Cold War divide between the Western World and the Soviet bloc in the nineteen fifties. The argument of the novel is that although conflict cannot simply be dispersed by the waving of a pacifist olive branch, violence and hatred can be tackled and brought to a harmonious conclusion.¹

Behind this political and social belief and its presentation in the novel is the Jungian theory of integration: although in Jung's philosophy violence and conflict are latent in the human unconscious, man can bridge the gap between conscious morality and sub-conscious amorality, if he is willing to recognise the power of the irrational and work through and with, rather than against it. The two levels of interest in The Land the Ravens Found arise from this view. On the one hand the local customs and loyalties that provide humankind with a sub-rational cohesion require to be nurtured and sustained; on the other the tribal consciousness must be accompanied by its antithesis, a rationalistic science-based humanism which transcends the patchwork of human history and tradition in order to promote world wide co-operation, and thus restrain tribal or nationalistic man from self-destruction.

1. "I had written a childrens' book ('The Land the Ravens Found') on the thesis that children like a good deal of violence and even a war situation but must at the same time see through it both in terms of its stupidity and also real pain and misery and death of those you love." Naomi Mitchison "Cold War - Then and Now", New Edinburgh Review (Edinburgh, 1980) No.52 pp.25-27.

The Viking expedition to Iceland is just such a balancing act. Iceland had originally been settled by those who preferred the old independent ways to the centralising autocracy of the Norwegian monarch, Harold Fairhair, but the survival of the new community depends on a burying of the hatchets. On a Scottish level, the Vikings are part of the nationalist heritage - a source, in Mitchison's view, of Scottish pride and confidence - but, as Mitchison had argued in nationalist circles since 1940, the rediscovery of local solidarity must be combined with a rigorously internationalist approach to the modern world.

The process of reconciliation and integration in the novel is presided over by the matriarchal figure of "Aud, the Deep-Minded", the bones of whose story are drawn from the Landnambok or Origines Islandicae. Aud possesses an awareness - born of experience - of the inner forces which compel human conduct, with a hard-headed pragmatism towards the social and material world. She is a business woman and a shrewd manager of men, but long-sighted as to the future welfare of her people. The journey to Iceland is her scheme and it is she who sees that the old divisions must be laid aside; she is also adamant that the appropriate religion for the new society is Christianity and not the darker Norse cults. Within the novel Aud is gradually converted from a realistic character into a matriarchal legend: she becomes a symbol of integration uniting the inner world of the psyche and the outer world of action.

This effect is achieved through the style of The Land the Ravens Found which merges the material and the moral to create a narrative

medium for both a historical leader and a matriarchal legend.

It would be for them to provide food, clothing, warmth and healing. Men had only fighting to do, but a woman's life was many-sided and far more interesting. Where men faced danger and pain and death in battle, women faced the same thing in childbirth. But at the end, all the men had was gold and prisoners. But the women had a new life to show. It was a proud thing to be a woman.

(The Land the Ravens Found p.29)

The words "food, warmth, clothing" and "danger and pain and death in battle" are physical terms that also convey Mitchison's sense of a whole cultural ethos and, beyond that, values relevant to all human beings regardless of race. But the reference to these wider conceptions is indirect and dependent on the novelist's personal recreation of historical and psychological type.

Mitchison's involvement with the Bakgatla tribe of the then Bechuanaland Protectorate in southern Africa also highlights her gifts for imaginative identification with a culture and the assimilation of its mores and ways of thought. During her stays among the Bagkatla, described in her autobiographical Return to the Fairy Hill (1966), Mitchison assembled a collection of tribal proverbs, seeing in them a kind of cultural shorthand, or condensed expression of social values, accumulated over many generations.

I think that the main impression is of a society with a set of checks and balances, which are not codified into laws, or rules, but are part of the social code: they are not enforced, but people who lapse, are reminded, through the proverbs, of correct behaviour. 1

1. This collection remains unpublished. It is similar in form and content to G.K.Pilane and Naomi Mitchison "Riddles of the Bakgatla", Botswana Notes and Records (Gaborone, 1974) Vol.6 pp.29-37.

This analysis of the tribe as a moral order, an order moreover that is enforced through consent rather than authoritarian control, breaks down the antithesis of barbarian and civilised which Mitchison had established in her early historical fiction.¹

The Bakgatla appear in fictional guise as the Bamatsieng in Mitchison's contemporary African novel, When We Become Men (1965) which sticks closely to her own African experience. The tribe is depicted as possessing all the strengths of a communal society, rich in myths, rites and symbols, yet the regiments or initiation bands around which this structure is built, supply not only a religious pathway from the living to the dead - psychological continuity and identity² - but a network of relationships which reaches through all ranks of society ensuring that everyone is cared for. The overall unity of the tribe is guaranteed by the authority of the chief but, although he is the apex of the structure of allegiances, the function of the tribe is not to increase his personal power and prestige. He is himself governed by a responsibility to the whole community and his conduct is measured against a canon of tradition, nurtured by the elders and preserved in the proverbs. The chief is a symbol of

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1. See Naomi Mitchison The Africans (London, 1970), for a discussion of "The African Moral Order".
 2. "It seems to me that this continuity in time is probably the main thing about all initiations. Without it people can feel trapped between birth and death, as I think, many people in Europe and America feel But all African initiations tie people in to the past through songs and stories and above all the hidden meaning of words and phrases; they tie people in to the future by giving them a sense of their responsibilities". Naomi Mitchison Return to the Fairy Hill (London, 1966) p.249 note 3.

communal pride and strength but he is also the Just and Merciful Judge, and the king who suffers and dies for his people: the tribe is both Marob and the loving community of Blood of the Martyrs (1939).

Membership of the tribe in When We Become Men is a heightened experience or sacrament, which lifts the individual out of loneliness and fear of death. The communal order posits a continuity against the flux of time, particularly through the initiations which link the living with the ancestors and the yet unborn. Because the tribal experience has these moral and metaphysical aspects, there is no need for a separate religious structure and the presence of Christianity is always, in Mitchison's African writings, an ambivalent one.

The drawback of the tribal moral order is its tendency to conservatism, but, argues Mitchison, given the right leadership, it is potentially innovative, pointing people forward to their future responsibilities. Mitchison's case is that the past and the future, man's psychological and historical heritage, and technological advance, can be reconciled, not by the preservation of particular cultural forms or social structures, but by a philosophical and imaginative intelligence which can draw on the past to direct the future application of increased knowledge and technical knowhow. In Europe Mitchison had witnessed the resources of the past, such as Scottish Gaelic culture, being eroded and destroyed; but in Africa she saw the humanist philosophy and politics of men such as Kenneth Kaunda, and the flourishing art of the west African states, as earnest of an alternative mode of development whose implications were worldwide. The problem of Africa, in Mitchison's fiction, is the problem of change

and a European understanding of the issues at stake, which is what Mitchison tries to provide in 'When We Become Men', is a matter of necessity rather than condescension.

Mitchison's African writings contain her humanist philosophy in an advanced form. She retains her faith in progress but qualifies it with her understanding of development as an organic process dependent on earlier cultural stages. At the centre of African thought she detected her own concept of all life, mental and physical, as the expression of an evolutionary life force in which man can participate because at the core of the psyche is this same universal mind or energy. Such participation constitutes Mitchison's understanding of religious experience which infringes, in her view, on literary experience because God, the life force or the Unconscious are also the Blakean imagination, the energy or desire which fuels the creation of literary symbols and yet reaches beyond them by virtue of its elusive indefinability.

In 'When We Become Men' Mitchison works towards her personal synthesis from the viewpoint of a traditional tribal society and of the urbanised, politically conscious worker. Isaac, the South African freedom-fighter, is at first critical of tribalism as irrational, oppressive and retrogressive, but his experiences among the Bamatsieng bring him to a different view. He comes to see that tribal values can be symbolic of the kind of society Africans desire for the future - not a chief-dominated power group nor a carbon copy of European industrialised society, but a truly modern and truly African culture. This wider philosophy controls the empirical material of the novel,

allowing the characters only so much internal development as will serve the purposes of the moral argument.

But When We Become Men is by itself a closed book, a code without a key. This is because Mitchison fails to convey any impression of the imaginative and philosophical sensibility which is required if the reader is to unite the empirical surface and the abstract argument in a coherent whole. Inasmuch as the novel claims to be an empirical portrait of southern Africa it is a sleight of hand, since the material is shaped by other premises than those of social realism. This indirection could be justified if it was a pointer to the inner poetic truths of the Romance imagination but, failing that, the novel is left as little more than a well told adventure story.

The lack of the essential, imaginative "middle-term", uniting the objectivity of language and the subjectivity of meaning in When We Become Men, is closely related to a deeply rooted contradiction in Mitchison's political thinking. Although her humanism portrays itself as democratic, in that development is to be for all, a small group of the highly conscious-*proto-individuals* - educated chiefs or increasingly scientists - must lead the way. Only they possess the necessary knowledge or sensibility and, incidentally, the willingness to sacrifice their self-enhancement for the sake of the many, which is Mitchison's defence against the reality of evil. Similarly, in the literary sphere, Mitchison's Romance art depends on its appeal to secret knowledge, an imaginative awareness on which the author's inspiration and the reader's recreative interpretation hinge. Mitchison's resolve to exclude subjective sensibility from the novel,

either in the form of a psychologically realistic alter ego or indirectly in a symbolic objective correlative such as Aud, empties it of its proper significance.

When We Become Men is best understood as a contemporary gloss on Mitchison's other African novel, the historical Cleopatra's People (1972). This novel is in line with the post-independence momentum towards a "rediscovery" of Africa's past but it also brings Mitchison full circle to the ancient Mediterranean and her earliest historical territories. For Mitchison, the historical novelist and Jungian thinker, the attempt to restore the African past to Africa was a natural and congenial activity: the indissoluble link between history, imagination and community is the subject of "Buganda History", one of Mitchison's African poems.

Behind the bark-cloth arras, in the black eaves,
the speaking Sybil
Possessed by the Kabaka who once possessed her,
centuries back,
What does she say?
Heirs of the Katikiro, starved princes,
Thin man whose beautiful grandmother became a drum,
Speak to us kneeling out of your dark. Unravel
Hard knots of old palm fibres. Make answer us
Dry voices from the jaw-bones of the great fighters
Wedded to drums. When the beat speaks to the new moon
Give us the rule of our forbears:
Who comes, who goes, how strikes the leopard, whose
thin spears sunder
Thick leaves of the past, the entangling orchid growth.
Unravel the dry palm knots, remember, tell us,
Lest we feel fatherless, lost in the terrible present.
Give us back our past. 1

The past is not the sum of by-gone events but the psycho-cultural background of the present; a journey back in time is also a journey

1. Naomi Mitchison "Buganda History", an unpublished poem.

into the psyche and a restoration of identity.

In Cleopatra's People Mitchison maintains an Aristotelian distinction between two kinds of history which is reflected in the novel's time-switches between the empirical, colloquial present and the already legendary past. On one occasion the Roman poet and propagandist of the Augustan view of Rome's past, Horace, meets the historian Asinius Pollio who is grappling like a Thucydides or a Tacitus with the complex realities of recent history. Pollio's comments on the Augustan version of Actium as a pivotal triumph is also Mitchison's comment on her own bi-focal view of Cleopatra.

'What I am saying is that Actium wasn't much of a battle. In fact its mostly an invention, a piece of literature to buttress up the story of the Princeps. Indeed there are moments when I wonder whether all acceptable history is not a poetic invention. There is also history of the kind I hope my own is, which simply intends to present the plain facts. But it is not acceptable in the same way. Not to ordinary people. It is not part of a religion. What you and Virgil, and for that matter Livy, though I find him tedious, are making is a religion around the idea of the new foundation of Rome. Admit it!'

(Cleopatra's People p.80)

This is the distinction between the truth of history and the truth of poetry, and it is indicative of Mitchison that she should use religion as a model for the kind of poetic imagination she favours. Through Cleopatra Mitchison evokes just such a legendary or poetic view of the Egyptian, and indeed African, past which, because it gives birth to action in the present of the novel, aspires to the status of myth or, as Pollio more accurately says, religion.

The structure of Cleopatra's People brings its two levels, the

empirical-colloquial and the legendary, closer and closer, both chronologically and experientially, in order to suggest a fusion between the myth of the queen-matriarch and the life of Aristonoe, who is revealed in her commitment to the Afro-Egyptian ideal as a daughter and successor of Cleopatra. The implications for contemporary Africa of a continent looking not northwards to the Mediterranean cultures of Europe but into itself and towards Asia, are present but unstated: the connections are there for those who wish to make them.

The place which Egypt holds in Mitchison's psycho-cultural geography goes back to her earliest involvement in the history of the Mediterranean world. In The Corn King and the Spring Queen (1931), it is in Egypt that Erif Der finds the equipoise of the powers of life and death which enables her to reintegrate the divided forces of her personality and return to Marob. Mitchison's renewal of contact with Egypt and its unique awareness of death can be traced in a series of poems written in 1960 and 1961 when Mitchison visited Egypt. These poems present a new view of the country from that of The Corn King, linking the death-wish which Mitchison sees writ large in the Pharaoh's funeral obsession with the measuring and bargaining money culture of one of the world's earliest and most autocratic developed economies.

Money and death and politics;
The fringed vulture and serpent, above all
The ubiquitous dung beetles, king of kings.
Dust on the gold, over and over gazed at,
Dusted over by envious gazes of the poor. 1

1. Naomi Mitchison "The Museum: Cairo", an unpublished poem.

In "Valley of the Kings",¹ another poem of the same period, this theme is expressed as a descent into the dark world of the pyramids. The narrator of the poem interprets the decorative motifs - "snake-heads, jackal-heads, ibis-heads and hawk-heads" - as a symbiology of death and corruption on which the hierarchical edifice of Egyptian civilisation is built. Only those who know the correct words and bring the correct offering can go before Osiris, the king of the dead and Pharaoh's divine exemplar, in order to be weighed in the scales and judged; for the rest there is only soullessness, fear and the images of nightmare. Yet the poet recalls a different god, Aten, and the heretic, prophet Pharaoh, Akhnaton, who established the worship of this life-giving sun deity. For Mitchison Akhnaton was a revolutionary who turned the world of money, power and nightmare upside-down. That is why his name has been "almost obliterated".

The cause of goodness in Mitchison's fiction, the cause of life, is that of the underdog and the heretic, but from the experience of defeat, and even death, are born potent images of hope, faith and love which go on to foster and renew these qualities among succeeding generations. Mitchison uses the imagery of Frazer's The Golden Bough, the symbolism of the Mediterranean mystery religions, and the theological motifs of Christianity to express this theme, and Cleopatra is another in the succession of leaders who die for their people and achieve a symbolic apotheosis or rebirth. She is the ruler of a conquered people and the foundress of the cult of Cleopatra-Isis, the goddess of suffering love, which, in Mitchison's recreation is given a specifically African thrust.

1. Naomi Mitchison "Valley of the Kings", Times Literary Supplement, (Sept. 8th, 1961) p.601.

Cleopatra is also a symbol of rebirth by virtue of her femininity; Isis is the archetypically feminine goddess who restores the slain body of her consort, Osiris. She combines the fertility queen idea with the moral humanisation of Christian atonement or sacrifice which characterises Cleopatra-Isis in Blood of the Martyrs ,

"..... some mystery, some expiation which must be suffered by some human so that all should survive. The pattern of suffering and death which come to women even more than men."

(Cleopatra's People p.192)

Through this pattern, Mitchison hints, the contradiction between the life and death instincts in the individual and society can be resolved and the hope for goodness maintained.

Like Aud in The Land the Ravens Found Cleopatra is a symbol of integration between the rational and irrational sides of the psyche, the inner "mythic" world and the outer field of fact and event. She is a hard-headed businesswoman and an astute politician, holding her own in the male world of thought and action while losing none of her essential femininity. Indeed she uses her sexuality as a means of communication and control in order to evolve a distinctively feminine style of statecraft; she harnesses unconscious and irrational energies to the purposes of the conscious mind, while they in their turn must respond sensitively to the tacit loyalties of the psyche. "Rationality," says Aristonoe's aunt Hipparchia, "is only one way of expressing what happens. It is a way of measurement. But some things are difficult to measure." (Cleopatra's People p.150).

Mitchison's Cleopatra is an effective symbol because the clarity

and economy of her literary execution holds the empirical and poetic hemispheres of the novel in a balanced counterpoint. Both of these worlds are personal constructions of reality and ought not to be judged in isolation against an exterior canon of reality. Mitchison avoids this risk in Cleopatra's People by denying any of her characters individual psychological depth. The presentation of Cleopatra and Aristonoe is strictly tailored to the historical context on the one hand and to the author's dramatic and moral purposes on the other. The result, it could be argued, is a limited version of experience but it is intended as such and finds its own strengths in this very act of restriction. The method is similar to that of the earlier historical fiction but disciplined and compressed, and content to achieve fewer things within the individual work of fiction.

Mitchison sees her science fiction in much the same mould, pushing her sense of cultural continuity into the future. In a preface to Solution Three (1975), she states that "the problems facing a writer of S.F. are somewhat the same as those of a writer either of historical fiction or of stories about people in another culture with another language."¹ This however ignores the fact that Mitchison's science fiction is a response to ideas alone and not to an actual culture. More clearly than in any other branch of her fiction is the empirical content an "effet du reel", the substance of the works philosophical Romance.

Mitchison was no newcomer to scientific thought when she came to

1. Naomi Mitchison Solution Three (London, 1975) p.5.

write her first science fiction novel Memoirs of a Spacewoman in 1962. Apart from the scientific atmosphere of her early home environment, she had imbibed the science and social thinking of H.G.Wells and throughout her writing career she had maintained an interest in the popularisation of scientific knowledge, editing two conspactive volumes, A Modern Outline of Scientific Knowledge (1931) and What the Human Race is Up To (1962). But predominant among these influences is the thought of Mitchison's elder brother Jack, a maverick and brilliantly original scientific thinker, who also wrote extensively for a general readership of scientific questions. In one essay he speaks of "the need to portray society as a whole" but adds that such attempts "generally fail because of the immense reach required in a mind which is to do the kind of thing which H.G.Wells has occasionally accomplished."¹ Haldane describes such conspactive visions of society as myths or prophecy, and issues this prescription for the contemporary mythmaker,

"The time will probably come when men in general accept the future evolution of their species as a probable fact, just as today they accept the idea of social and political progress. We cannot say how this idea will affect them. We can be sure if it is accepted it will have vast effects. It is the business of mythologists today to present that idea. They cannot do so without combining creative imagination and biological knowledge. 2

There is no doubt that when Mitchison turned to science fiction

1. J.B.S.Haldane 'The Inequality of Men' (London, 1932) p.85.

2. Ibid., p.96.

she was thinking in her brother's language, and in What the Human Race is Up To (1962), published in the same year as her first science fiction novel, she uses the term "prophecy" in relation to novel writing. But in Mitchison's work the moral and intellectual import is subordinate to the capacity of literature to touch "the uncomprehended background" of human experience through the symbolic imagination. There is a strand of undiluted intellection in her fiction but it is derivative and often awkward, falling far short of the theoretical verve of the idea-spinning in fictional form which J.B.S.Haldane undertakes in his own The Man with Two Memories (1976). The lateness of Mitchison's coming to science fiction may be due to the fact that she had felt overshadowed in this field by her famous scientist brother. He had always represented for Mitchison intellectual achievement in the male-dominated world of formal education and research, but in later life the rivalry between these two precocious children was resolved and each encouraged the other in their own spheres of thought and action.¹ This conflict is another aspect of the contradiction between Mitchison's official rationalist inheritance and her own imaginative sense of the irrational domain, which, I have argued, is the generating impulse at the core of her fiction. The placing of science at the centre of her creativity heralds an easing of the contradiction between the two opposing poles of her thought world; when, eventually, she came to science fiction it was on her own terms.

1. See Naomi Mitchison 'You May Well Ask' (London, 1979) and Naomi Mitchison "Beginnings" in K.R.Dronamraju (ed.) Haldane and Modern Biology (Baltimore, 1968).

The intellectual sub-structure of Mitchison's science fiction is exposed to view in 'Solution Three' (1975), a thinly textured novel whose theme is the evolution of Utopia through the application of scientific ideas, and the qualification of this rationalistic aspiration by factors in the human psyche which reflect the complexity and unpredictability of biological life. Mitchison's projection for twentieth-century man begins with the contemporary historical crisis of diminishing natural resources, political instability, and national, ideological and racial tension. The culmination of these trends is apocalypse or holocaust which conveniently effects the modulation from the historical to the post-historical, the novel to the Romance.

The first phase of global reconstruction (Solution One) is a population and food programme designed to restore economic and social stability, but it is the second and third phases on which Mitchison's attention centres. Solution Two is the initiation of the scientists into their role as the leaders and moral guardians of mankind, their philosophy the beneficent application of advanced technology to the planet's problems. The result of this programme is, in its turn, Solution Three or the genetically controlled development of a new, rationally orientated, heterosexual humanity, the human clones.

The main flesh of the novel is devoted to the qualifications of this technocratic optimism. Even in the plant and animal worlds genetic engineering quickly stumbles against the tight interlocking of characteristics in nature such that very rarely is any innovation straightforwardly good or bad.

'It now began to seem probable that in the course of breeding, some of the genes had been knocked out, ones with unwanted characteristics, but also perhaps carrying guards against certain funguses, bacteria or viruses, which might now have found their way through.'

(Solution Three p.21)

On the human and moral level, the same problems could arise with the new clones.

'Naturally, their taking over is something we've all looked forward to, the Council at last of pure goodness, without our worries, our unworthiness, our bad memories and guilt. But mightn't it sometimes be important to have in the Council this very varied unworthiness, and in the process of caring for one another - the way you're caring for me now, which of course is laid down but nevertheless is deep and real - something new comes to light?

(Solution Three p.54)

The platonic pursuit of the good and the rationally desirable, Mitchison argues, must be balanced by a sensitivity towards the vagaries and fulfillments of the human psyche. Among the rational planners and rulers must be included those with imagination - historians, for the past is the map of man's psychology, and artists, responsive to the living inheritance of former cultures and mentalities. Correspondingly in the biological sphere, forms of life that are not immediately useful or desirable are to be preserved as a storehouse of adaptation for the unpredictable future interaction of man-controlled evolution with the raw material of nature. This is the anticipated though unrealised Solution Four.

Solution Three highlights the analogies between biology, psychology and sociology, which are utilised in Mitchison's earlier

fiction, but fails to provide a convincing imaginative vehicle for the ideas; this is the prerogative of another science fiction novel, Memoirs of a Spacewoman (1962). The theme of both works is the future psychological, social and moral evolution of mankind, brought about through genetically controlled biological evolution. In both novels these developments are the responsibility of a special class of leaders - scientists or space explorers - whose vocation is the discovery and application of scientific knowledge for the general good.

In the Memoirs, however, the emphasis is on moral and psychological rather than social evolution, and more specifically on the emergence of new intellectual and sensory capacities. These are demonstrated by the central character, Mary, who establishes communication with various non-human forms of life by means of her heightened powers of intuitive imagination. The suggestion is of a tacit dimension which is the medium of extra-sensory perception and of a common psychic existence that extends to plants and animals as well as human beings. This idea is the successor, in Mitchison's science fiction, to her use of the Jungian unconscious as a conceptual dress for her imaginative probing towards the psycho-biological unity of all life.

The Memoirs are built around a subtle blending of the physical and mental worlds: the variety of beings encountered by Mary, the space explorer, reflects the flexibility and adaptability of the human psyche, making the exploration of the universe a model of human potentiality. On the other hand, thought forms, whether terran or Martian, are closely analogous to physical structures and relationships:

Mary's own communication expertise is based on the relationships of mothering and sex.

On an intenser level, in heightened descriptive sequences, the boundary between the inner and the outer eye is dissolved in a symbolic yet concrete, and analytically perceptive prose-poetry.

The wretched caterpillars curled up or crept aside, the colours paled, the eye spots dimmed. They seemed to shrivel as from an inward searing. We watched with intent sympathy, not knowing whether or how to act ourselves. Yet we were also aware of the attackers, the whirl and flurry of wings, the colours beyond anything I have ever perceived on any planet of any sun, the antennae stiff and pointing like weapons of offence, the legs glittering and jointed as strange armour might have been. There were several of them, and for a moment one or another might be posed so that it could be seen, as doubtless it could see us from its flashing and faceted jewel eyes, now diamond, now sapphire or emerald. But it was beyond us what was happening, or why this anger and judgement was being projected on to the wretched crawlers in the bog of algae.

(Memoirs of a Spacewoman pp.95-96)

The observational accuracy of this passage gives an impression of scientific objectivity which is reinforced by the use of words and phrases with an anatomical flavour: "eye spots", "jointed", "faceted", "projected". However, this film of objectivity only lets the emotional colour come through more sharply. Mary's previously established sympathy for the warm, soft, vulnerable, caterpillar-like creatures is carried over in the words "curled up" and "crept aside"; and these feelings, as she herself acknowledges, are maternal. At the same time the anger and aggression of the butterflies - "the antennae stiff and pointing like weapons of offence, the legs glittering and jointed as strange armour might have been" - adds to rather than detracts from their extraordinary beauty.

The whole incident makes a strong emotional impact on the observers which can only be explained by the parallels between these strange creatures and human existence. As physical beings the butterfly and caterpillar equivalents of this alien ecosphere are accurately and vividly constructed from the starting-point of the earthly species, but they enjoy an intenser existence as embodiments of an equally strange entanglement in humanity on the ground base of physical being - warmth, comfort, generation and sex - and the higher ideals of beauty and intellect. This level of meaning is conveyed through the differing reactions of the crew members to the butterflies' persecution of the caterpillars, as the expedition progresses.

The structure of the Memoirs is episodic, depending for its unity on the expansion of Mary's experience as an explorer and communicator. Each expedition introduces a new kind of problem, from the technical difficulties of radial, "four-channel" thinking, through the moral challenge of the Epsies' world, to the full-blown metaphysical issues of the butterfly and caterpillar connection. Interwoven with these expeditions are the episodes such as the grafts and the birth of Viola which, because they demand a full commitment of Mary's physical and emotional make-up as a woman, render her most vulnerable.

Overall Mary's experience is a journey towards emotional happiness and moral wisdom which is not won without pain and suffering. The way to maturity is shown to be an acceptance of the process of change and the inevitable mixture of good and evil, happiness and pain, which it must bring. This aspiration, as Mary realises, requires a

balancing act around certain paradoxes.

I suppose one of the things which one finds it hardest to take is that one must develop a stable personality and yet that inevitably it will be altered by the other forms of life with which one will be in communication, and that these bio-physical alterations must be accepted. And only can be accepted by the stable.

(Memoirs of a Spacewoman pp.8-9)

Growth demands expansion of experience and thus communication, but the receptivity that true communication entails brings with it a loss of selfhood. This is the "negative capability" of the artistic mind, the exercise of the sympathetic imagination.

Yet there must also be barriers against which the self defines itself, and limits to both challenge and frustrate exploration.

"Does communication wipe out imagination, which is, in a sense, solitary?", Mary wonders (Memoirs of a Spacewoman p.9). Or again, at the suggestion of unlimited advance in the technical bases of communication,

Sometimes I wonder if I really want quite that amount of communications efficiency. Mightn't it take something out of exploration which we would miss, some spiritual tension that comes only in isolation?

(Memoirs of a Spacewoman p.87)

The pursuit of perfection is tempered by a recognition that many aspects of experience, not least the imagination, are not amenable to moral analysis.

The explorer also lives through a paradox of time. As a physical, earthbound creature, he or she is under the sway of clock or biological time which dictates the growth and degeneration of the

body, but there is also subjective time in which the explorer participates by virtue of the immense speeds involved in space travel. Time travel in the 'Memoirs' is a metaphor for the quality of experience enjoyed by the moral explorer and adventurer, a quality which is so foreign to the measure of clock time as to belong to another dimension.

In her explorations Mary encounters an epitome of time transcendence in the butterfly that has apparently escaped the biological cycle, and radiates, consequently, an intense joy, for which the text advances correlates in human experience.

This begins to be extremely difficult to describe, except in analogy. But it resembled the dream which I believe most Terrans have in which it has at last become apparent that all problems are ludicrously simple and solvable, once some principle is grasped: that complete and eternal happiness and knowledge are within easy reach. It is, of course, a negation of the human condition, though something to which perhaps we have struggled a little way. The elements of this feeling, then, were unswerving optimism based on almost arrived-at universal perception and insight. Our nausea and pain had vanished in this glow of happiness or, in so far as they were still there, were unimportant - as unimportant as the tickle of an old scar to someone listening to the climax of some superb piece of orchestration. 'You are near,' the butterflies signalled to us, 'near.' And somehow we were certain - or at least I was - that they shared whatever area of feeling we ourselves had gone into. It was curious that none of us noticed the other butterfly until we were almost on it. I suppose we had expected some still more astonishing play and blaze of colour. In fact it was almost colourless, though the rhythms of colour still played through the greys and creams, the dusk and early dawn, of its wingspread. It was circling round a tree which had a particularly beautiful and curiously shaped blossom; once it alighted apparently to find a more intense aesthetic perception whose echoes reached me as an enhanced sense of well-being or hope.

The immortality ascribed to the butterfly is godlike, but it is an externalisation of a rare yet attainable sense of bliss and inward ecstasy; the attributes of divinity - truth, beauty and immortality - are humanised to become the moral and metaphysical Absolute which parallels, on the mental plane, the life force.¹ This experiential Absolute is neither deified nor conceptualised for it is a manifestation, symbolised by the butterfly, of the Blakean imagination, the force of desire that drives man towards the highest and best he can conceive.

But this single butterfly is at the apex of an interlocked system of dependence on lower forms of life which must be denied fulfillment in order that its perfection may be realised. Similarly, although the explorer may experience such heightened awareness and bliss, their existence is inexorably bound to earth to which they must return in order to give birth to the next generation and eventually to die. Mary and her fellows ought to adhere to the rule of non-interference in other forms of life, and make no judgement on the respective merits of the butterfly and caterpillar species. So in human terms the biological as well as the moral and spiritual side of life cannot be devalued or subordinated; the natural life-span brings its own kind of joy as Mary's final union with Peder shows.

There are indications, moreover, that fulfillment on the moral

1. The religious ideas behind this passage are remarkably similar to those expressed by Mitchison's father, in J.S.Haldane The Philosophy of a Biologist (Oxford, 1935) pp.131-173.

plane is modelled on the natural cycle of birth and death; exploration and communication demand from Mary their own kind of "death to self".

He said that one must be ready to be taken in, even if that meant being laughed at afterwards, because there must be no barriers between oneself and other entities. Disbelief must always be suspended. Humiliation. But of the very bottom, when the moral and intellectual self one so carefully builds up has been pulled down, when there is nothing between one and the uncaring trampling foot of reality, then one may at last and genuinely, observe and know. And the process of humiliation, Peder said, must happen again and again.

(Memoirs of a Spacewoman pp.40-41)

This scientific version of self-sacrifice is explicitly contrasted with the hallucinations of crucifixion which Mary experiences in her extreme emotional reaction to the mass annihilation of the Roundies. Its concept of sacrifice or self-surrender to the evolving process which constitutes reality represents Mitchison's reconciliation of the life and death instincts. The process of change is the road to death but also the means of growth and transformation.

The existence of an explorer class distinct from the normal run of "terrans" clearly resembles the scientific "professorials" in 'Solution Three', but the explorer image is primarily indicative of an inner mentality. Mary and her associates are the kings and queens of the science fiction society by virtue of their brand of enhanced self-awareness rather than their social position: Mary herself is in the line of symbolic matriarchs of Mitchison's later fiction. Like Aud and Cleopatra she is an image of integration between the inner and the outer worlds and of rebirth through her feminine nature.

There are, however, significant differences in Mary's portrayal. The crucial turning-points of birth, death and of passage from one stage of life to another, which Mitchison saw at the centre of tribal societies, and which later with Jung she identified as archetypical categories or modes within the psyche, are present in Memoirs of a Spacewoman, but in an indirect form. Instead of adopting them straightforwardly as literary images, Mitchison transposes them into aspects of moral experience which are part of the regular workings of consciousness as well as climactic occurrences. Taking the concept of metamorphosis or transformation as integral to the nature of the psyche, she shows it working out in the ongoing awareness and complete life experience of Mary as communicator and explorer.

There is no hint of an appeal, in the Memoirs, to the prior existence of certain psychic forces or categories. The success of the novel arises partly from its evocation of psychologically central aspects of experience but such evocation is a concomitant rather than cause of the sense of the real, that the text creates. This unwavering approach to wide-ranging themes by indirection, through the individual and unique, is the novel's greatest strength.

The Memoirs combines the poetic and naturalistic strands of Mitchison's fiction in a unified narrative medium, because the viewpoint and structure of the story stem from a single character. Through the use of the first-person "bildungsroman" type of Romance, the confessional form, Mitchison collocates the three different kinds of figure which inhabit her novels. Mary is indirectly a symbolic paradigm; she is in touch with the comic world of typical experience

which eventually claims her; and she is an individually realistic character portrait which draws on Mitchison's autobiographical self without detracting from its artistic objectivity. The uncertainty which sometimes arises in Mitchison's earlier novels as to whether a particular passage is a representation of exterior reality, or a reflection of the mind of a particular character or group of characters, or indeed of the author, is avoided: the inner and outer world are held in unambiguous equipoise.

Equally the combination of a Romance structure, in the Memoirs with a final comic movement or happy ending, is appropriate to the sexual and psychological metamorphoses which provide the episodes and themes of the work. Form and content seem to grow into one another for, although the structure is a conventional one, its use is individually vindicated by the idiosyncratic talent of the author.

Memoirs of a Spacewoman is a unique and original variation on the recurring themes which dominate Mitchison's writing. Her literary practice has produced a long series of consistently varied works which span the twentieth century and courageously straddle the divide between popular and serious art; even in old age she has refused to write the same book twice. At the same time the Memoirs is the central example of the aims and virtues of Mitchison's later fiction, which keeps to the discipline of the linguistic medium, achieving effects through a skilfully selective awareness of both the powers and the limitations of language. The result is an economic and purposeful style in which communication and expression are evenly balanced. It is accurate and yet capable of poetic evocativeness; it

is colloquial and comprehensible to a wide audience without being slangy, commonplace or flaccid. Only an assured, if uncomplacent, reconciliation of the polarities, between the inner and the outer, the social and the personal, the rational and the irrational, and between tragic awareness and optimistic humanism, that energise and sometimes distort Mitchison's fiction, could have enabled this poise. The Memoirs spring complete from a visionary moment in which the disparities of Mitchison's world view cohered.

The novel is also a retrospect on Mitchison's literary career and signposts a new clearheadedness as to the nature and purposes of her art. The activity of the sympathetic imagination in writer and reader is urged as inescapably moral - a process of communication and identification in the cause of truth and love. In her African writings Mitchison speaks of the writer as a "shape-changer" able to enter into and share experiences that the mass are either "too hurried or too scared to enter."¹ It is the imagination which can rediscover the unity of mankind beneath the false divisions of class, money, colour and power. The political dimension of literature stems directly from the moral nature of communication since the writer can, in Mitchison's view, contribute to the breaking down of barriers and the probing of the complex issues of loyalty in the modern world. In an article about the Author's World Peace Association and its efforts to thaw the Cold War, Mitchison compares the writer to a translator whose heightened awareness of language allows him to promote mutual

1. Naomi Mitchison African Heroes (London, 1968) p.7.

understanding.¹

All of these elements are implicit in the portrayal of Mary as a builder of understanding between individuals and cultures. For her as for Mitchison the interpretative and expressive powers of the imagination are a means to experiential growth rather than an end in themselves. The last remnants of aestheticism have been sloughed off.

1. Naomi Mitchison "Cold War - Then and Now", New Edinburgh Review (Edinburgh, 1980) No.52 pp.25-27.

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